



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

CIMM • NUMBER 010 • 2nd SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Wednesday, February 6, 2008

—
Chair

Mr. Norman Doyle

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• (1545)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, CPC)): Since it's 3:45, we will bring our meeting to order. Our apologies for keeping our witnesses waiting. We did have votes in the House today so we're a bit late getting here. I'm sorry about that.

We do want to welcome you here today for the pre-study of Bill C-37, An Act to amend the Citizenship Act, and we have with us today, and I want to welcome on behalf of our committee, from the Lost Canadian Organization, the person who needs no introduction to us—he's been here before on a number of occasions—Mr. Don Chapman.

Welcome, Don.

Representing Canadian War Brides is historian Melynda Jarrett.

You have been here before too, Melinda. Welcome to you.

And of course Mr. William Janzen, director of the Ottawa office of the Mennonite Central Committee, is a familiar face as well and has been here on a number of occasions.

Thank you.

So we'll pass it over to our witnesses, and I think, Mr. Clerk, it's a 10-minute opening statement from each of the individuals.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Andrew Chaplin): Yes.

The Chair: Who do we begin with?

Mr. Janzen. Thank you.

Mr. William Janzen (Director, Ottawa Office, Mennonite Central Committee Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Everyone here is familiar with the proverb about the perfect being the enemy of the good, and this bill is good. Indeed, it's very good. It doesn't cover everything that we might wish it would cover, but the members of this committee have worked hard on these issues. They've submitted good reports, and the government has come forward with a bill that addresses far more than any piece of legislation hitherto has done.

It is tempting to put forth several suggestions for improvements, but I will refrain from doing that, because I want to emphasize the importance of the bill, and to express the strong hope that it can move through Parliament expeditiously and that it can be passed and adopted.

The main reason we strongly support this bill is that it will abolish the loss retention provision, which is section 8 in the current act. This provision states that if you are a second-generation born-abroad person, then you have citizenship until age 28. But before you turn 28, you have to go through a retention process. If you fail, then you cease to be a citizen at age 28.

We have never quarrelled with that principle: that second-generation people should be required to take some explicit steps if they want to remain Canadians. Our problem has been with the administrative confusion, because when this section came into force in 1977, the certificates of citizenship that were issued to people who came under it were identical to the certificates issued to people who did not come under it. Given that not nearly all second-generation born-abroad people came under it, there was a huge problem in identifying which second-generation born-abroad people do come under it.

The certificates looked exactly the same, so I could tell many stories of people going into citizenship offices with their certificates and saying, "Is it true that this certificate will cease to be valid when I turn 28?", and the official looks at it and says, "It looks like it's perfectly valid to me." And it does look like it's perfectly valid. Then they don't go through the retention process, and eventually they cease to be citizens when they turn 28.

There are other problems. Even people who know that they need to get a new certificate, they become confused with the word "retention". Those of us who work on this issue all the time know that the term "getting a retention" is a little bit different from simply getting a new certificate. They go on to the Internet, they see an application form to apply for a new certificate, they apply for a new certificate, get a new certificate, and think they've met the retention requirement. They haven't. They need to fill in exactly the right form. So there's confusion.

We have not argued with the principle of the retention requirement, only with the confusion of administering it. But that confusion is so serious that we are very, very happy to see it abolished.

I'd like to give one more reason why it should be abolished, and that is—not from our perspective so much as from the perspective of Canadian society—under the current law, as it stands, a person who's a second-generation born-abroad person may have a baby before turning 28. There's nothing unnatural about that. That baby is automatically a Canadian citizen until they turn 28. That baby has a child before their 28th birthday, so that baby is automatically a Canadian citizen until age 28. It can go on for an infinite number of generations. People can be Canadian citizens without ever developing any kind of connection with Canada. Surely it is in the interests of Canada not to allow citizenship to be cheapened so much in that way.

• (1550)

So for that reason also we are happy to see the loss retention provision abolished.

Some people will argue, well, what about the second-generation people? In reality, let's say, there's a family of first-generation people living outside of Canada and they have some children. Well, the children are second generation. That family, or even just one parent, can come to Canada at any time, as long as that child is a minor, and apply for permanent resident status quite easily and then get citizenship status. So it's not as if the door is absolutely closed to people who want to retain Canadian citizenship. It would not even take any more time than the current retention process would require. So we are willing to accept that as a trade-off. It involves a little more paperwork, but we think it's a reasonable way of dealing with it.

There are several other issues on which we could make suggestions for improvements, but I think given the time slot and my colleagues here, I will leave it at this, and if there's time later, I may return to some of these points.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Janzen.

We'll now go to Ms. Jarratt.

Ms. Melynda Jarratt (Historian, Canadian War Brides): Thank you for inviting me today. This is my fifth appearance before the committee, and I have to say I'm a little disappointed that Bill C-37 has not become reality.

I wrote some notes so I could at least have some thoughts to refer to.

After listening to Bill, I think it's important to clarify the process and who's responsible. It's my understanding that the bill has had first reading and it has to be brought forward to the committee. However, that has not happened yet. Nearly 60 days have passed since the bill was introduced in the House of Commons, on December 10.

I was full of hope in December that we could have this bill passed very, very quickly. As far as I know, everyone is in favour of it. I am. War brides and war bride children are in favour of it, and they're expecting it. In fact they think it has been passed; they don't know that it hasn't.

When the minister, Diane Finley, phoned me on December 10 to explain Bill C-37—as she did with Bill and a number of us who were involved in this issue—I was virtually assured that the passage of the

legislation was guaranteed. I wrote down what she said that day because I wanted to remember it; I'm a notetaker, anyway. I asked her how fast this bill could be passed. She said, and I quote, “The ideal is that the committee will push it through as fast as possible. It's entirely up to the committee.”

But the committee can't deal with legislation that has not been sent to it. It's easier for me to travel all the way from Fredericton, New Brunswick, through snowstorms, sitting on the tarmac for an hour, rerouting to Montreal and Toronto, losing my luggage, staying a night in the hotel, and getting here by taxi, than it is for the bill to make its way from down the hall somewhere to this committee.

There is something wrong with the process. We need to get this process speeded up. It's absolutely imperative. It is stalled at the most critical time, given the election fever in Ottawa. I'm not impressed, and neither are most Canadians, that there's talk about an election right when we need to get these very important bills passed that people are waiting for, and they have been waiting a lifetime for in some cases.

Why am I here for a fifth time to speak about this bill? It has still not been brought forward to the committee. It has been 60 days now. It's inexcusable. It's an insult to the 43,454 war brides and their 20,997 children, who they brought to this country in 1946, that it has not been brought before the committee. The committee cannot deal with legislation that has not been brought to it.

It's a national disgrace that these elderly women and their children, especially those who are now in their sixties.... It's these 20,997 children. They are the ones who are most affected by this. These kids—they're not kids anymore—are now 63, 64, 65, and they're approaching CPP and OAP time. Many of them, for the first time in their lives, have been confronted with the reality that the status of their citizenship is in doubt. It's upsetting. I don't have to tell you how upsetting it is. They're afraid. The war brides are afraid to come forward. The ones who never ever left the country, never applied for passports, and who've never had an issue with their citizenship are afraid with all this talk now. They're afraid to come forward with all this uncertainty.

And believe me, I know first-hand about the very personal impact this is having on their lives and how they fear applying for a passport in case their citizenship status is detected by some ill-informed bureaucrat within the department. For example, I know of an 86-year-old woman who was stopped at the border between the United States and New Brunswick two and a half months ago, and she was told to go back. She wasn't allowed in the country because she didn't have her citizenship card.

And there are the children. Let's face it, most of the elderly ladies have dealt with it by now. Those who haven't are going to hide their heads in the sand. They will go away very quietly, and they will die away. But the children have a good long life ahead of them. They've had their lives turned upside down when they found out, after living here all their lives, since the day they stepped off the boat as babes in arms, as Senator Roméo Dallaire did on December 13, 1946.... He arrived here on the *Empire Brent* with his mother, a Dutch war bride. He found out when he was 21 years old that he was not a Canadian citizen.

•(1555)

It's infuriating to them that they're told they can't vote, that they have to apply for permanent resident status, or they're a subsection 5(4), a special discretionary grant from the minister.

These people have worked all their lives in Canada. They've voted in every election. Some of them have worked as enumerators, for goodness' sake. They've paid taxes. They've even served in the military. Their fathers served Canada with honour during World War II. Their mothers are Canadian war brides. Is this the way we treat the children of war brides?

Subsection 5(4) is not an answer. And it's not the rule of law; it's a special favour of the minister. That's not the way citizenship should be dealt with in this country.

If their fathers were Canadian veterans and their mothers were British war brides, and if they came to this country with the mass transport of war brides at the end of World War II, they are Canadian citizens. If you take the temperature of Canada on this subject, Canadians are going to agree with you on that one.

The surviving war brides and their children don't want to hear any more excuses. They've waited long enough. They've waited 62 years. It's long enough, wouldn't you agree? Their children especially, the war bride children, the 65-, 66-, and 67-year-olds, want to move forward. They want to have a future. They want to make plans. They want to get their lives in order. They want to apply for their Canada pension. They want to apply for their OAP. They may want to take a trip and get a passport. Guess what? It's all held up.

They absolutely have to have this very central part of their identity straightened out so they can get ahead with their lives, make these applications and go on trips, but they're afraid they can't. They don't want to be used as political pawns. They're upset. They're nervous. They're worried. They're fed up. That is not the feel-good story that should be coming out of the very good, hard work of the people of this committee.

You guys have heard a tremendous amount of emotion poured out in front of you here at this committee, the heart and soul of individuals across this country. So many good people from the four parties have sat here and listened to that. They're heart-wrenching stories from people who have cried here. We've had to watch helplessly as the tears in their eyes just spilled out like a flood, and they've been spilled in front of you here in this committee.

It's not the story that politicians want to hear on the eve of an election, which, I tell you, I don't want to hear about, and I don't think the war brides, and their children especially, want to hear

about, especially if this bill doesn't pass. The Canadian war brides and their children are not props to be used for political advantage. They are a Canadian icon. They are the most revered and respected citizens, whom Canadians have fallen in love with. The story of love and war, of passion and tragedy, of overcoming so many obstacles, of courage and strength in the face of adversity—it has been the subject of Hollywood movies, of television documentaries, of countless radio interviews, of innumerable print media, Internet articles and books, including my own: *War Brides: The stories of the women who left everything behind to follow the men they loved*.

I have an entire chapter on the issue of Canadian children of war brides and the issue of citizenship. It's gone out of print. It sold out in Britain. I'm going to be rewriting chapter eight, and I would like to have a happy ending to this story, and I'm sure you guys on this committee, who have worked so hard, all of you—Andrew Telegdi, Meili Faille, Bill Siksay, Ed Komarnicki, Norman Doyle.... There are so many people. I've seen the same faces over and over again here. It's very sad. At this point, all of you have worked so doggedly for the citizenship of people you don't even know, and you knew it was the right thing to do. You can be the heroes of the day. But if this keeps up and the committee does not get the bill immediately—this process I was referring to earlier—I'm not the one who's going to be saying very nice things. I'm not. I'm not going to say nice things, because you guys are in control of the process and you haven't done what you're supposed to do.

Who's "they"? Well, you figure it out yourselves.

•(1600)

Two months ago, I praised the minister when she introduced Bill C-37 in the House of Commons. Just last week I was in Vancouver for the citizenship ceremony of Joe Taylor, who was granted a subsection 5(4). In an interview with Curt Petrovich of CBC's national news, I said, "I've got to give credit where credit's due." The Tories introduced a bill when no one else would do it. And that is true. I have to give credit where credit's due.

The Chair: Ms. Jarratt, you have half a minute.

Ms. Melynda Jarratt: Okay, I'm getting to the end.

It doesn't seem to have been carried through.

Ed, you said it wasn't personal, but you know the war brides and their children are going to feel that it's personal. When discussing strippers is more important than discussing war brides and their citizenship at this committee, it's infuriating.

Where is the blame going to lie? It's going to fall where the deck of cards is going to fall.

I want to see this passed. Let's get it passed. It's the right thing to do. It'll look good for everybody, and it's time.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that passionate presentation. It was good.

Mr. Chapman.

Mr. Don Chapman (Lost Canadian Organization): I guess I should start with kind of a show and tell. I don't even mind passing them around.

This is a picture of a bunch of women in World War II in the air force for Canada. One of them, with the little arrow, is Kathleen Fremont, who is a lost Canadian. Her brother served in the Pacific, and she really wants to come home.

This is a picture of me holding my daughter, who's now 21—she's just a baby—standing on the border of Canada, and I'm trying to get my citizenship.

I started this process 36 years ago, and I was born in Canada. Here's my birth certificate.

We've done something very good. Everybody now recognizes that there are hundreds of thousands of people affected by this. We're down to, let's say, killing this bill or passing the bill. There's no question; everybody I talk to is on board. The only ones who are not on board are politicians. But the people who are affected are all on board for this bill. Frankly, given Ottawa politics, the way they are right now, this bill might die. So time is really of the essence.

We have a lot of solutions on this one. I've been dealing with all parties along the way.

Here's something. This was brought out just at the end of December. The Civil Liberties Association names the best and worst of 2007. Among the best things in Canada was the lost Canadian stuff that you guys have been doing here in committee.

We're there at the end. I don't want it killed.

Here's something. I have three copies of this if you want to take a look. Here's the United Nations magazine *Refugees*. If you look at the cover, they're dealing with this strange, hidden world of the stateless. And you look at it and say, what kind of country would do that? And as you turn the page, it just becomes appalling—until you get to dead centre, and they're highlighting the lost Canadians of Canada.

The Economist did a thing on Canada. This is our chance to show the world by our actions that we can easily correct human rights, and this is a human rights abuse. Everybody agrees with it. So it might not be perfect, but hundreds of thousands of people are affected, and believe me, I know the law really well.

Here's the 1947 act, and it says that Canada will give me back my citizenship. But somehow we've fallen through the cracks, and they haven't for 36 years. In all that time—going back 61 years, since the politicians made a mistake—nobody's had the guts to really turn around and correct it until now. So thank you to all of you for putting in all the work you have.

The only thing I can say is let's pass it. It doesn't look as though it's going to go with amendments, so we're saying we'll deal with that down the road, but at least we get our citizenship. This is truly a life-and-death situation for an awful lot of people. When you're dealing with World War II veterans, if we go further, a lot of them won't be alive. Unfortunately, I've been at this a long time. I am the centre of this thing, and I have seen a lot of people die over the years, disenfranchised from the country they defended.

I can get into a lot of very specific issues, but we'll do that in question period, I think, Norman. I'm ready at any time.

• (1605)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Don.

We've been given great information today.

I would imagine there are a lot of questions that want to be asked, and I will go first of all to our seven-minute round, to Mr. Karygiannis and then Mr. St-Cyr.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Thank you.

I listened with interest to Mr. Janzen when he said that people, instead of applying for retention under this new scheme that the Conservatives are doing, can apply for citizenship and/or apply to sponsor their children. This is something that you alluded to, sir. So if somebody is a Canadian who was born abroad, and their children, the second generation, are born abroad, they can apply to sponsor the children. Is this what you suggested, or am I mistaken?

Mr. William Janzen: Yes, they can come to Canada.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: The window of opportunity is 22 years.

Mr. William Janzen: Yes, there's a substantial window.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Here is my thought. My daughter was born abroad to a Canadian citizen and came to this country at two months old. She is one of five children. If, for whatever reason, she decides she wants to live abroad for a couple of years and has a child, under the new scheme the Conservative government is bringing in, only the first generation born abroad would be Canadian citizens.

You're telling me that my grandchild would have to be sponsored into Canada by his or her mother. Is this what you're suggesting?

Mr. William Janzen: Yes.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Isn't that something similar to the troubles and tribulations that you're going through? Mr. Chapman said that he was with his one-month-old daughter at the border applying to get what was rightfully his, to come back into Canada.

Mr. Don Chapman: Can I respond to that?

I was born in Canada, and under the current act I'm the one who was stripped of citizenship. So it's not the first generation born abroad; the generation born in Canada, under the current laws, are the ones most affected.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Are you stateless?

Mr. Don Chapman: No, the United States gave me citizenship, but I've never vowed citizenship to the United States.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Let me give you another situation that could happen. I can talk to you about a child that will be stateless. My daughter was born in Greece. Her parents were Canadian, but because they've taken out Canadian citizenship and were also Greek citizens, the child who was born in Greece was stateless and had to be given Canadian citizenship.

Mr. Don Chapman: Correct.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Let me finish, Mr. Chapman.

If my daughter marries a Greek and they go back to Greece and have a child there, if that gentleman is also a Canadian, her child will be virtually stateless, because Greece will not give them citizenship. The child, being second generation, will not have citizenship. At least you had an opportunity to be an American.

Mr. Don Chapman: Actually, no, I never vowed citizenship to the United States. They gave it to me; otherwise I would have been stateless. It was the United States that came to my rescue.

As far as applying is concerned, I know about that very well, because I had to apply to become a landed immigrant in the country I was born in. I was a Canadian citizen. I know the ropes. But Canada has signed a convention against statelessness. I've had several talks with legal departments on this.

•(1610)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: That will fly in the face of what the Conservatives want to do.

Mr. Don Chapman: I don't think so. I don't believe that.

In the case of your grandchild being stateless—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: That is hypothetical.

Mr. Don Chapman: —Canada must deal with that, and they've signed a convention against statelessness.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Melynda also talked about 29,297 children.

Ms. Melynda Jarratt: It was 20,997.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: If you multiply it by two or three generations, we could have about 60,000 Canadians in that boat.

Ms. Melynda Jarratt: The average birth rate for that group of Canadians is 2.5.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Then we're looking at about 50,000.

Ms. Melynda Jarratt: It would be 20,997 times 2.5.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Then it would be 45,000 or 50,000.

The difficulty is the second generation. That is my only concern. I don't see why the Conservatives needed to put that in about the first generation, and first generation alone, born in Canada. Are they trying to get back to what happened in Lebanon? Are they trying to send a message to the ethnic minorities? Are they trying to send a message to the people who come from different countries? That's my only concern.

I'm wondering if you have any comments on that.

Mr. Don Chapman: I do. I've been around the circuit—on the political side, the academic side, and everywhere else.

I think all countries of the world are starting to redefine who belongs in their countries and who doesn't. You see it in Holland, Australia, France, Germany, all over. Eventually under the current system, if you don't put some stop to it somewhere, it might happen that everybody in the world ends up as a Canadian citizen. Just out of common sense, you have to start establishing some attachment to the country, somewhere and somehow. All countries are grappling with this.

On the matter of the second generation born abroad, my grandchildren will be in that boat. I was denied my Canadian citizenship, and my children were not born in Canada. My grandchildren would be born abroad if my daughters have their children outside Canada. What we have there is the 22 years. My children could sponsor their children, and they're going to be accepted because they're children.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Your children would be Canadian citizens.

Mr. Don Chapman: My children would be Canadian citizens.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Why should your children then have to sponsor their children as immigrants, and then these children have to wait so long, three years, before they become citizens?

Mr. Don Chapman: That's true, but now think of it under the current situation. I was born in Canada, and I had to apply to become an immigrant.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: We're talking about your grandchildren here.

Mr. Don Chapman: No, not my children. They too had to apply as immigrants. So did I, under this system.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: But your children would be Canadians born abroad.

Mr. Don Chapman: My children would be Canadians born abroad.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Your grandchildren will have to be sponsored into Canada by their parents.

Mr. Don Chapman: Yes.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: The sponsorship—

Mr. Don Chapman: We don't seem to have a problem with that, because we think there should be an attachment to Canada, and we do know that if my daughters elect to have a child in Canada, the child is born in Canada. If the child is born outside Canada, it's a guarantee that they can sponsor that child to Canada.

The Chair: I have to interrupt, because we've gone over our seven-minute period.

I will go now to Mr. St-Cyr.

Thank you, Mr. Karygiannis.

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Thank you all very much. I found your presentations most interesting. I wasn't able to attend the initial meetings, because I was not yet a member of this Committee. I have only been Bloc Québécois critic in this area for several weeks. It's a very interesting issue and, like you, I am anxious to see the bill referred to Committee. In fact, we already made it clear to the government that we were prepared to cooperate, if the process had to be expedited at the House, to avoid stretching out debate unnecessarily, and to make it possible to get the bill into Committee very quickly. I hope the other parties will do the same, because this is very important. I think we can pass it quickly. If the government tables the bill in the House for second reading, all the parties will surely agree to act on it very quickly, so that that step doesn't take forever and we can get it to Committee quickly. I hope that will be the case.

I thought I understood you to say that you had all read the Committee's unanimous report on this. I would like each one of you to tell me whether the bill we are currently reviewing, which has been tabled in Parliament, abides by the spirit of the unanimous report presented by this Committee?

• (1615)

[English]

Mr. Don Chapman: Yes. I'm very pleased. I would like to see this legislation go forward. Everybody—lawyers, attorneys, everybody I've talked to, scholars—is saying we should pass this legislation, and go forward with it as is.

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Madam?

[English]

Ms. Melynda Jarratt: Yes, I agree as well. It's as Bill said, perfection is the enemy of the good. It's not perfect, but I certainly need to see this pass. I can't take it anymore. It's just too much sorrow and sadness and upset. I agree with it.

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: I am going to interrupt you. You presented your views earlier. I understand that you want the bill to pass.

Mr. Janzen, I would like to know whether you think this bill resolves the issues that were raised in the Committee's unanimous report, or whether there are fundamental differences between the report and the bill currently under review.

[English]

Mr. William Janzen: No, there are not major discrepancies. There are some details that one could pick up on, but this is totally compatible with that report and picks up the main thrusts of it. That's why we support it.

Could I take a very short minute to respond to a question that was raised earlier about the second and third generations?

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: We will come back to this, because there will be other turns.

Mr. Chapman, you lost your Canadian citizenship because your parents, or one of your parents, emigrated to the United States.

Mr. Don Chapman: Yes.

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: I would like to be given a very brief explanation of the process whereby the Canadian war brides lost their citizenship. The same thing occurred with the Mennonites. What caused the problem?

[English]

Ms. Melynda Jarratt: Okay. This is the history.

The Canadian war brides who came to this country believed that they had been given citizenship by virtue of every statement that had been given to them, and every document in the years between 1942 and 1946. They came here, were handed documents saying, welcome to Canada, you're a citizen, and the children as well. They believed that they were citizens, but then the Citizenship Act was introduced on July 1, 1946, came into effect on January 1, 1947, and it changed the status, and they had to apply for citizenship. If they were in the country on January 1, 1947, they were deemed to be Canadian citizens.

The thing is that in the case of Senator Roméo Dallaire, for example, he was out of the country on his 24th birthday, so he found out, because he went and applied for his passport, that in fact he had not filled out a little form and had lost his citizenship. You're new to the story, but essentially what happened is that they didn't fill out forms and they lost their citizenship.

In the case of war brides today, like the one who was told at the border two and a half months ago, what happens is that.... Not every person in this world travels abroad. There are lot of poor people out there who live in little rural communities, like in my province—I live in a very rural province, in Doaktown—or little towns of 5,000, 2,000, or 1,500 people. Going back to Europe was out of their reach economically because their families were gone and they didn't have the money. Here they are, they're 82 or 83 years old, and for the first time in their life maybe they have a chance to go back home to Britain, and they go and apply for a passport and find out they didn't fill out the form.

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: The women we are talking about are women who married soldiers...

• (1620)

[English]

Ms. Melynda Jarratt: Yes, exactly.

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: ... while they were serving overseas.

Ms. Melynda Jarratt: They are war brides.

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Mr. Janzen.

[English]

Mr. William Janzen: Thank you.

The case of the Mennonites is that there were in the last century a number of Mennonites, several thousand, who moved to Latin America for religious reasons. Some of them became very poor there, and they would really like to come back, so they have applied for citizenship. And there are tens of thousands, maybe 50,000 in southern areas of Ontario, Manitoba, Alberta, and other parts.

I'll give you a little story. One of them called me a few weeks ago. He has been living in Canada for more than a decade, he owns a construction company in Calgary, runs it, and he said, I heard that I may have lost my citizenship, is that true? I asked him how old he was, and he said he was 30 years old and was born outside of Canada. I asked him if his parents were born outside of Canada. He said yes, they were, and then he told me a story. He said, somewhere I heard that there was a question and I went to the local citizenship and immigration office several times, showed them my certificate, and asked if I needed to do something so that I could remain a citizen, and I was told no, you're okay. But now you're telling me that I'm not okay. I said, you're right, I'm terribly sorry, but that is the way it is.

That is the way it happened in his case. In that individual's case, he will be able to get a remedy because he has been in Canada for just over half his life and the minister is willing to use the discretion in subsection 5(4) of the act for people who have been in Canada for over half their lives. But there are many cases where people have been in Canada a little bit less than that, and it takes a huge process.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Janzen. I'm sorry to cut you off.

Ms. Chow.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Since 1987, successive governments have studied this problem over and over again. We've had the reports called "Citizenship '87 : Proud to Be Canadian"; "Canadian Citizenship: a Sense of Belonging"; another report called "Updating Canada's Citizenship Laws: Issues to be Addressed"; a fourth report, "Citizenship Revocation: a Question of Due Process and Respecting Charter Rights"; a fifth report, "Updating Canada's Citizenship Laws: It's Time". And we had Bill C-63, Bill C-16, Bill C-18, Bill S-2, yes, and now Bill C-37.

With minister after minister, government after government, it did not get done. I've seen so many reports. I called out all the reports because, yes, I'm semi-new to this committee but I'm not new to this issue, because I worked for a member of Parliament in 1981, 1982, 1984. We've been talking about it since I started.

I don't know about you, but I am so tired of the delay. We've had this new government for two years, and yet we are at this stage. This morning I looked at the parliamentary schedule. Is Bill C-37 on the schedule? No, it's not on the schedule, and it's not on the books.

So I want to ask you one question. You should give us a deadline—the government, not necessarily us. I will pledge that the NDP will speed up that process, expedite it as much as possible. I will print out all the reports and all the bills that have gone through in the last 20 years and stack them up and maybe present them to you as a present of some kind. But give me a deadline. How long do we need to wait?

I just pulled out my schedule, my calendar. It is February 6. You should give the government a deadline as to what date it should come to second reading, how many days should get it through the

House of Commons. We've debated this ad nauseam, many times. You've come here many times. So give us a date. When do you see this bill pass this committee, come back to the House and have it finished? Because it's not rocket science. We know what we're doing. We've studied it many times.

So don't mind me for the rant. It's just that I've looked through this and I've asked how many more bills are coming.

If it is true that we have another election, guess what. Even if it passes, we run out of time in the Senate. I can see that we're going to come back here again. Some of us may be back; some of us may not be back. I don't know. We're going to have another bill, C-whatever it is, and we will repeat this all over again two years later. Some of those people may not be alive anymore, and how many more people are going to be caught in this bureaucratic nightmare?

I'm sorry to rant, but give me an answer. I don't usually rant, but it's just unbelievable.

• (1625)

Mr. Don Chapman: Yes, it is. Again, it comes back to my daughter and me, and she's 21 years old. When she was a baby, I was trying to get this through. So I go way back before 1984.

I talked to the minister's office today, and they were saying they are happy to get this bill to the committee with priority. They say they could probably get it through in a matter of weeks. The problem will be this committee and whether they attach amendments or not, and that could delay it. We say just pass the bill. If they can get it here, I agree with you, pass the bill.

Mr. William Janzen: May I suggest, given that this involves war brides, that it would be a wonderful Valentine's Day gift.

Ms. Olivia Chow: That's next week.

Ms. Melynda Jarratt: It's another historic day today, because today is the 62nd anniversary of the departure of the very first war bride ship in what they called Operation Daddy, which was the beginning of the war bride transport in 1946. Today is the 62nd anniversary of that.

Two years ago, when we had the 60th anniversary, I thought it was just a matter of weeks, months, whatever, when this was going to be sorted out, and here we are. Do you know how many have died since then? I have lost many war bride friends, and the children also are not getting any younger. They're getting ill and sickly too.

It is personal. It's very personal. It's very important. It would make a wonderful war bride Valentine's Day gift, and it would look great—I'm telling you—great, warm and fuzzy. There's nothing but good to come out of this for everybody, and why not? You can do it. You can start wars, all kinds of things, at the drop of a hat. Why can't you straighten this out? All of you together, work together, please, right away.

The Chair: You have a minute and a half left, Ms. Chow.

Ms. Olivia Chow: I give it up to whoever wants to ask a question. I don't have any more questions.

The Chair: Good, thank you very much.

They were very good points you made there.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Thank you very much for that impassioned plea. There is no question that this legislation is long overdue. I can tell you that before the committee left they said Bill C-17 would be the first order of business, and that's why it was there.

With respect to this particular bill, I would ask particularly the Liberal members and the critic there to get their members to support the bill as it is. In fact—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: —I would challenge each and every member here today to go on record as saying we will support that bill's passage as it is without amendment, and we'll have that bill before this committee and before the House for passage.

What has happened—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: I have to interrupt on a point of order.

On a point of order, Mr.—

Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC): There's no point of order.

The Chair: I'll hear Mr. Karygiannis' point of order.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Is Mr. Komarnicki asking a question to the witnesses, or is he daring a challenge?

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

Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I'm saying if we have these members, every member, on record today saying we will support the bill as it is—although it is not completely perfect, it covers the majority, if not most, of the situations you raised—that bill will be before here, it will be before the House, and let's see it pass. We want that to happen.

But I can tell you this. We had a unanimous report, and that unanimous report came from this committee. In that unanimous report we specifically said that citizenship would be limited to the first generation born abroad—that was a specific recommendation. There was a lot of give and take, if you know. We had to bend. Others had to bend. And we bent to make that a unanimous report.

The report said:

The Committee recommends that the amendments to the Citizenship Act provide that the following people are Canadian citizens: Anyone who was born abroad at

any time to a Canadian mother or a Canadian father...retroactive to birth, if they are the first generation born abroad.

Mr. Telegdi said, and I quote: "As long as the legislation fits the report, it will get very quick passage, and I think they'll get great cooperation from the House of Commons to make this a reality."

Then after we got there, the next question was to propose at least one, possibly two amendments. They wanted to deal with the issue of extending it beyond the first generation—which we had already agreed to in this committee, went to the minister with, and had a report back on from the minister.

That said, we're in a place where we have a piece of legislation that can go forward, and I would ask each and every member if they're prepared to say here and now, today, that they will support the bill as it is.

We'll bring this bill here, and I can say this—

• (1630)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Bring the figures.

The Chair: Order, please.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I can say this: it's time to fish or cut bait. It's time for members to stand up and be counted, and I'd like to hear what they have to say.

Now, Mr. Chapman, I can say that initially, when we first met... we've come a long way, because a lot of this was in turmoil; there wasn't agreement on many issues. But to be frank about it, the progress that has been made from that point...and I'm not talking about committee reports, as Ms. Chow indicated. This is not a committee report; this is a piece of legislation that's been proposed. We've come a long way in addressing many concerns.

Would you agree with me that we ought to pass this thing as is and each member should stand up and be counted?

Mr. Don Chapman: I would tell you that every player from my side, all the key players who are going to be affected by this legislation, will agree that it's time to pass this legislation right now, as is.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Without amendments?

Mr. Don Chapman: There's no time. So yes, without amendments. We are thrilled. That will take care of about 95%, then we have the subsection 5(4) to go forward. My family members will be second generation born abroad, and we don't see that as a problem. Yes, we've come light years from where we were.

This is the time. If I could say one thing, it is that now is the time, truly, to put politics aside and have everybody jump on a bandwagon for this thing called Canadian citizenship, because before we have any political party affiliation, we are Canadian citizens, and we're supposed to stand up for each other. For 61 years Canadian citizenship has been under attack, if you will, by the legislation.

Now we can try to fix this problem. Let's do it.

The Chair: I think Mr. Janzen had a comment too. Do you want to give Mr. Janzen a chance? It's up to you.

Okay, Mr. Janzen.

Mr. William Janzen: You referred again to the question of first or second generation, and I just want to say that at present, for a second-generation person to retain Canadian citizenship they have to spend at least one full year in Canada, and that has to be done before age 28. Under this new bill, if a parent comes to Canada with a child any time before that child turns 22, that child can be sponsored to become a permanent resident and then become a citizen, and that process would probably happen in less than one year. So it easily—

An hon. member: No, it won't.

The Chair: Order, please.

Mr. William Janzen: We are prepared to accept that. For children, for minors, it goes quickly.

Mr. Don Chapman: I could suggest that if this bill does not pass, then the age 28 rule continues, and a lot of people will start losing their citizenship under that 28 rule who are second generation born abroad. So it's actually imperative to go forward, for those second-generation people, to pass this bill.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: That's true.

Ms. Melynda Jarratt: Yes, this can't continue. It cannot continue, absolutely.

Can I speak?

The Chair: Sure.

Ms. Melynda Jarratt: This cannot continue, because there are just too many people's lives that have been put on hold here. I'm not joking there. When you can't even buy.... I know people who have bought tickets to go to Britain thinking they were Canadian citizens, and then they thought, I have to get my passport renewed. They hadn't had a passport in, say, 10 years. They had had passports before. And then in filling out the form they suddenly found out that they were not Canadian citizens. And boy oh boy, that's just one small thing. CPP, OAP, health care provisions—it just goes on and on and on.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I certainly can indicate that there are obstacles we can deal with. As Mr. Janzen and Mr. Chapman said, there are statelessness provisions that we can deal with. There is the sponsorship provision we can deal with to address some of the issues. But I respect the three of you enough, from what I've heard all this time, that I would actually.... Because you want to support this bill as it is and you want it to pass, I would like to hear our members say we're behind you and that we will support that bill as is in order to have it passed. I'll see to it that we get it here for that purpose, and through the House, in an expeditious manner.

The Chair: You have four seconds left. Thank you, Mr. Komarnicki.

I'll now go to Mr. Telegdi.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The first meeting of the committee that we were supposed to have was cancelled. In the second meeting of the committee we were listening to strippers. Then we had the Conservatives vying so we could listen to some strippers some more. At the last meeting we had of this committee, the parliamentary secretary was again pushing to get the strippers back.

Mr. Janzen, you said perfect is the enemy of good. Yes, but I think what we also have to recognize is that we have two citizenship acts that were total screw-ups. We have 50 amendments attached to them. It's a citizenship act where you have barnacles growing upon barnacles growing upon barnacles. You need to be a constitutional lawyer to try to understand it, and it has very many unintended consequences.

So for the Conservatives to try to grandstand at this point in time

An hon. member: It's a real shame.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: —when they waited until the last second in December to table a bill—

An hon. member: Where are the figures? Bring the figures forward.

• (1635)

The Chair: Order.

Give Mr. Telegdi the courtesy that he gave you when you were speaking, please. He didn't interrupt, and I ask that he be given the same courtesy.

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

To watch the grandstanding is a little bit much. Olivia named those reports, and we did those reports with unanimous agreement from the Conservatives. But when they got into government, it was not a priority.

We had a minister, when she was first confronted with it, who told us that we were dealing with a couple of hundred people. We know that we're dealing with hundreds and hundreds of thousands of people.

Now, I am very keen to see the bill go through, but I'm not going to sit through another bill that has many unintended consequences. We have to do due diligence on the bill, and we have to have the public able to respond if we are going to be changing something as important as the Citizenship Act.

Let's be clear. The fact that you are here today and that we're talking about this has everything to do with the opposition on this side, despite the obstruction of the government on the other side. Here we're talking about a bill that isn't even before this committee. It was the opposition that fought to get this bill to this committee.

The kind of position the government is putting you in, putting us in, and putting Canadians in is, quite frankly, terrible. It's bad government. That's how you get bad legislation. Make no mistake, we are keen on getting this thing resolved, but we are also keen on doing a good job so that somebody doesn't have to come here and clean up after our mess.

In terms of the question Mr. Karygiannis asked, I think it's a fair question to ask: how many people are affected? We have asked this of the government. We have had no answer. We have to know what the scope of this is. How many people is this impacting? That's very critical. We really have to know that.

The opposition has been willing to sit extended hours to do whatever it takes to deal with the bill, but also to get the answers to our questions to make sure we can craft the best possible bill.

As I said, again, I understand politics. I've been sitting here for 14 years. But I'm not going to listen to the government grandstand about something on which we had to drag them along to get any action at all.

I hope the government is going to be forthcoming with that information. I hope they table the bill in the House and bring it here, because we have some important work to do. If need be, we will sit extra hours. We agreed to do that the last time around, because we wanted to get the bill done and we wanted to get the report done. Any foot-dragging on it has been by the government. Any grandstanding politically on this has been by the government.

So I am hoping that the push you provided today is going to result in our getting the bill and getting down to seriously working on it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Telegdi.

We'll now go to Mr. Carrier.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I'm relatively new to this Committee: I began in late November, early December. I was working alongside Ms. Meili Faille, who had been the Bloc critic in this area for several years. I know she did very good work.

One of the first things I reviewed was the infamous Committee report. The draft was dated November 20, 2007. So, it's recent. And, if the decision was made to write a report, it's because there was a need for a joint study that would enable the Committee to set out the facts. Unfortunately, I cannot go back in time, as Olivia did, to explain the various timelines. I'm trying to look towards the future.

I understand your impatience. Ms. Jarratt said that the bill was tabled in December. Sixty days later, it has yet to be passed. However, you have to consider the holiday break. We are only at our second week now. And, we are aware that it is important for the bill to come back to Committee to be reviewed.

The Bloc Québécois is definitely in favour of quick passage of this bill, which is based on the Committee report. You confirm that the bill is consistent with that report. Although it may not be perfect, it is a major step forward as regards the many cases that you mentioned.

The Bloc Québécois is prepared to cooperate in order to expedite passage of this bill. Coming to Ottawa from Quebec, one cannot help but notice that the parliamentary process is very slow. Even though it can be passed at third reading and after many different steps—debate in committee, second reading, third reading—when we get here, we are told that it then has to be reviewed by the Senate, which is like a second level of Parliament. Furthermore, the Bloc Québécois is in favour of its abolition, as it prevents effective government.

However, we cannot start an armed revolution in order to change things; that is just the way our democratic system works. When you don't have a majority government in place for four years, it can happen that several bills die at the end of a Parliament, because an election is called. I just wanted to convey that to you. Meili would have liked to tell you that we fully understand the issue, because she worked on it actively. We will be supporting this bill in as constructive a manner as possible, to ensure its quick passage.

I won't go into detail with you regarding those who have lost their citizenship, because that has already been discussed. We fully understand your issue. If we had to go through this, we would be in the same position.

• (1640)

[*English*]

Mr. Don Chapman: If I could comment, I was the person behind Bill S-2. It was the first bill on lost Canadians to restore citizenship for one particular group.

It was interesting that it failed twice in the House. The Senate picked it up, which was very historic in some ways. That's why it was Bill S-2. The Senate ended up passing the bill in one week—passed, done, over, unanimous. Then they sent it back to the House and forced the House's hand, because in the House they played politics.

Anyway, it was very interesting. I brought that up today, that if we can't do it in the House, let's go to the Senate and get them to do it, and then force it back in the other direction.

Mr. Robert Carrier: Yes, but if it comes back...[*Inaudible—Editor*]...before.

Mr. Don Chapman: Either way, yes. *Merci*.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier: Do I have a minute left?

[*English*]

The Chair: You have 20 seconds.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier: I will let...

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead and ask a question, if you want, Monsieur St-Cyr.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: I just wanted to respond to Mr. Komarnicki with respect to his proposal. The Bloc Québécois is in full agreement with the idea of moving quickly, insofar as we abide by the spirit of the unanimous report. We don't intend to start drafting a whole series of amendments but, of course, if we discover a major flaw in the meantime, which would do more harm than good, we reserve the right to move amendments. As there doesn't seem to be any, I believe there should be no problem passing it quickly.

• (1645)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. St-Cyr.

We'll go over to Mr. Batters.

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

I want to welcome all of you back to committee and to thank you very much for your hard work and persistence. Persistence is an understatement when it comes to this file. Thank you very much for your passion and all the work you've put into this.

Ms. Jarratt, I feel your passion. This is an issue where we should be able to put all partisan politics aside. I'm relatively new to this committee. Frankly, I don't even know the history of which party started this push, or all the different reports that Ms. Chow alluded to. I just know where we are now and what you'd like to see done. I don't have to read all of your supportive quotes and to have you reiterate on the record that you're very supportive of the legislation as is.

As Mr. St-Cyr just said, the Bloc Québécois is supportive of the legislation as is, based on the unanimous report of this committee. Ms. Chow is just about begging the government to bring back this legislation to the House for second reading, so it can go through special passage.

I want to say, before I go on, that I have a great deal of respect for my colleague Mr. Karygiannis, as I do for Mr. Telegdi. I know they are both very passionate about this issue. They've pushed very hard on this for their constituents and Canadians. However, I'm a bit confused by Mr. Telegdi's statement that we have to do our due diligence. He did state on CBC that, "As long as the legislation fits the report, it will get very quick passage, and I think they'll get great cooperation from the House of Commons to make this a reality."

That is all we're seeking today—and I'll get to my question at the very end.

Mr. Karygiannis, I ask for your indulgence. At the very end, there will be a question for these three witnesses.

I know that Mr. Karygiannis, who's fought hard on this issue, wasn't here the week of the unanimous report—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, on a point of order, if we're going to go through this thing, I don't think—

Mr. Dave Batters: Don't count this against my time.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: We have the same rules as we do in the House on a member's presence. So I'd like the member to make a retraction, as well as to apologize. The fact of whether I was here or not here is not something that should be—

The Chair: That's a valid point of order. There's no need for an apology, but a retraction is—

Mr. Dave Batters: I will freely do that, Mr. Chair, because I'm being as magnanimous and as non-partisan as I've ever been in this place.

After looking you in the eye, Mr. Karygiannis, and telling you I respect you a great deal, yes, I will apologize for that statement. It was not intended.

The Chair: You will retract that?

Mr. Dave Batters: I do retract it.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, that is a point of order.

An hon. member: Do you not accept the apology?

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, that is a point of order.

Can I ask Mr. Khan, please, either to speak on the record or not to speak at all.

The Chair: Okay, but that's not a point of order.

Mr. Batters.

Mr. Dave Batters: I am aware that everyone who has led on this issue—Mr. Chapman, Ms. Jarratt, Mr. Janzen—wants this bill passed as is. You'd like it as a Valentine's Day present to war brides. I think that's a fantastic idea.

An hon. member: Hear, hear!

Mr. Dave Batters: I know that the government, the parliamentary secretary, has indicated they will bring the bill forward as soon as possible, as soon as we know that it will—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: When? When?

The Chair: Order, please.

Mr. Dave Batters: I'm going to tell you when, Mr. Karygiannis, please.

The government will bring the bill forward as soon as we know it will have speedy passage through the House of Commons and come back to this committee and be sent back to the House and off to the Senate.

I've already said how much I respect Mr. Telegdi and Mr. Karygiannis, and I respect how hard they've worked on this. Mr. Karygiannis has a small difficulty with this bill. He wants it extended further to the second generation—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, I have point of order again.

Mr. Dave Batters: This can't be deducted from my time.

• (1650)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: If my colleague wants to quote me over the problem I have, then I would suggest he either ask me directly if I have a problem or not, or not put words in my mouth.

The Chair: That is not a point of order.

Mr. Dave Batters: I'm roughly paraphrasing Mr. Karygiannis' position, and he's perfectly capable—and I know he has a good voice in this place—to clarify it if need be.

He has some problems with this bill as currently drafted, but it has unanimous support literally from everyone else. I ask through you, Mr. Chair, that Mr. Karygiannis consider passing this bill without amendments, so that we can get 95% or 96% or 97% of the way towards perfection, and to give up that little bit he would still like to see. I know he's passionate about this issue. There's a little bit there —

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, my question is very simple. Is he addressing me or—

The Chair: Mr. Karygiannis, please stop interrupting. It's your turn next.

Mr. Dave Batters: I'm addressing the witnesses.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, is he addressing me and making comments to me or is he questioning—

The Chair: That is not a point of order.

Mr. Dave Batters: I'm addressing the witnesses.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: If he's addressing the witnesses, then he should pose the question to the witnesses.

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

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: It is not a monologue.

Mr. Dave Batters: And none of this can be deducted from my time.

The Chair: Order, please.

Mr. Dave Batters: Mr. Karygiannis, frankly, sir, after I just praised you and the hard work you do for you constituents, show me a little bit of respect in this place as well. Okay? Please.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, are you running the meeting or is he—

The Chair: Order, please.

Mr. Dave Batters: To the witnesses, I ask that you please commit to us to do the following.

The government has said it will bring this bill back to the House if it's assured that the Liberals will not propose amendments and drag out the debate in the House of Commons. You've just heard basically the same words from Mr. St-Cyr, Mr. Carrier, and Ms. Chow.

I know you've held many discussions with Mr. Telegdi; I can't even count how many discussions Mr. Chapman's probably had with Mr. Telegdi. Will you commit to discuss this with the Liberals after this meeting today and ask them—even though it may not be exactly as Mr. Karygiannis wants, but it's what you want—to please drop their desire for amendments and agree to rush this through the House of Commons so we can get it back to this committee and off to the

Senate? Will you commit to take that up with the Liberals, specifically Mr. Karygiannis and Mr. Telegdi?

The Chair: Okay, we've heard the question.

We'll have a brief response from Mr. Chapman, and then I need to go to the next speaker.

Mr. Dave Batters: That was taken off my time with Mr. Karygiannis, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I gave you almost two minutes over.

Mr. Don Chapman: I have a flight out at seven this evening, so I have to get straight to the airport. But when I get back I will be talking to everybody on this bill. We want it to go forward as is. I'll tell you the way to address it going forward—and there is no question. As soon as this bill is passed, we can start on a whole new citizenship act, which everybody knows we need to have. That's how to go forward addressing amendments and everything else. We'll do a citizenship act down the road.

Mr. Dave Batters: Would the other two like to respond?

Ms. Melynda Jarratt: I will stand on my head in the corner and spit nickels to get this—

Mr. Dave Batters: So you'll talk to the Liberals?

Ms. Melynda Jarratt: Yes, I will.

The Chair: Mr. Janzen.

Mr. William Janzen: I think our message here is clear.

Thank you.

The Chair: Order, please.

Mr. Karygiannis is next for five minutes, please.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I want to thank you, but I want to set the record straight. I hope the parliamentary secretary, Mr. Khan, Mr. Batters, and Mr. Grewal will pay attention so there's no reprehension as to what we're saying.

When the committee started, the minister said there were 400 lost Canadians. We told them there were more—50,000, probably half a million. We moved the bill forward to where it is today. It wasn't because of the Conservatives that the issue was raised; it was because of a motion I put in due to my daughter. So under no circumstances am I going to sit here and take lessons from Mr. Batters as to the position I have on this bill.

Right now there is a request under access to information and a motion that we get figures on first- and second-generation Canadians born abroad. This went to the minister in December. The minister and the parliamentary secretary did not want to deal with this issue, as you heard very well from Mr. Telegdi. If it weren't for this side pushing to have this issue come back to the table and be discussed, we wouldn't be here today.

Mr. Komarnicki is grandstanding and stating that I am committing the government to do this, but he should be committing the government to provide us with the figures we're asking for. He said last week that those figures were in front of a minister. So does he want to know what the actual numbers are? Does he want to know how many first generations are out there—how many second generations, and how many we don't know yet, besides the 400 the minister originally talked about? Do we want to know the figures—yes or no?

If he wants a commitment, I will give him my personal commitment to speedy passage of this, not only for him and my daughter, but for everybody—all the people it's affecting; not the 400, but the thousands, if not millions, of people they're hiding the figures on.

I want a commitment from the Conservatives, and especially the parliamentary secretary. When are they going to provide figures to us?

I'd like to split my time with Mr. Telegdi, Chair.

May I have an answer?

•(1655)

The Chair: We don't need you to, because we have Mr. Batters and then Mr. Telegdi.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: How much time does Mr. Karygiannis have?

The Chair: Two minutes.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Would you want to know the figures?

Mr. Don Chapman: I would be happy to do my best. I'm the guy who came up with a lot of the numbers—through one of the lost Canadians, Dr. Barry Edmonston from the University of Victoria. He's one of Canada's leading demographers and he was a lost Canadian. He really studied this issue. And you know what? At best, we have guesses. Nobody really knows the numbers, so if we press for actual numbers we will never get them.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: But we know the actual numbers from the department—first and second generation born abroad. They have the numbers. Mr. Komarnicki said that they're in somebody's desk, waiting to be signed off. Don't you want to see those numbers?

Mr. Don Chapman: It would be nice to see them, but here's the problem. I have to go back to my airline pilot days. We're below the peaks of the mountains and we're aiming at the mountain and we're going to hit it in 45 seconds, so we had better either add power and climb out of there or we're going to have a crash site.

The way I view this one is that we've already studied it, over and over and over. Whether the numbers are 1,000 or 50,000, it's time to pass this bill, because if we don't we're all going to be back in legal limbo-land.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: However, Mr. Chapman, in order to go over those mountains, one of the things that you must have is extra fuel. Mr. Komarnicki has it—he can bring us the numbers very easily.

Mr. Don Chapman: But no matter what the numbers are, whether they're 10,000 or 100,000, it's time to pass this bill.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: But do you agree, sir, that if the numbers are a million Canadians who are first generation born abroad, this might put the issue in a different perspective?

Mr. Don Chapman: I happen to know that the total number of lost Canadians is about a quarter of a million people, so I doubt if we're talking a million people.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: No, I'm talking about born abroad, first generation.

The Chair: Mr. Janzen, and then I'll go to Mr. Batters.

Mr. William Janzen: Among the people I work with, approximately 1,000 turn 28 every year. They face confusion. Those 1,000 people are reason enough for me to support this bill. They call for help. Trying to sort out their situations is plenty enough reason, but I don't know all the other numbers.

Ms. Melynda Jarratt: From my perspective, the children are getting to be 65 and 66. The time is ticking. As I said in my second performance before the committee a couple of years back, the royal “you know what” is going to hit the fan. Well, it has started to hit the fan. Quite frankly, we can continue this for the next 20 years. How many angels can dance on the head of a pin? It could go on forever and ever.

With all due respect, Jim, I know how passionate you feel about this, but I have to say that at this point, as Don said, we are heading for the mountain. We're going to crash and burn. Now is the time to fish or cut bait. I feel that we can deal with the issue of the second generation born abroad at a later date.

The Chair: Five minutes: split between Mr. Batters and Mr. Khan.

Mr. Khan.

Mr. Wajid Khan (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): I'd just like to make a brief comment and then my colleague Mr. Batters will take over.

We've had discussions on this bill. We've had expert witnesses. They've given us a factual, passionate presentation. We all agree with what they're saying. I do not understand why we have to play political ping-pong with issues that are so important. I think it's time to move on. It's time to pass this without amendments. Any further issues can be addressed down the road.

That's all I have to say, Mr. Chair. On to Mr. Batters.

•(1700)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Khan. Very good points.

Mr. Batters.

Mr. Dave Batters: Thanks, Mr. Kahn.

This may be the last time I speak on this issue. Let me say to all members present and to the ladies and gentlemen from the media that this is an opportunity, a rare opportunity, for all of us parliamentarians to be heroes. This is not going to be a Conservative government win. It is not something that's driven by the NDP, the Bloc Québécois, or the Liberals. This is a unanimous report. We can all be heroes to these three people and all the others who are affected by this.

I seize upon Ms. Jarratt's passion. She said—I don't know if this is on the record—that she would stand on her head in the corner and spit nickels if she thought she could get this bill through. That's how badly she wants this bill to pass. I ask the members to take this up at the end, specifically with Mr. Karygiannis, and urge him to be a hero. He can be a hero to his constituents and—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, on a point of order—

The Chair: I don't think that is a point of order, Mr. Karygiannis.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: It is a point of order, Mr. Chair, and if you want, I would ask you to consult with the Speaker. I don't think this is an appropriate question. If you, sir, do not think so, then I would ask you—

The Chair: Could you repeat the question again, Mr. Batters? It went over my head.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: A lot of things go over your head.

Mr. Dave Batters: Sure.

I'm going to make a statement, and I'm going to ask if you agree with me, that all the Liberal members opposite and all the members of this committee would be heroes if we were to put all the political grandstanding behind us, take a bill that's based on the unanimous report of this committee, and rush it through the House of Commons and over to the Senate, and pass it. All of us around this table would be heroes to pass this bill exactly as is, regardless of the figures that Mr. Karygiannis is asking for, whether it is 50, 400, a quarter of a million, or one million people. I don't have a clue what these figures might be.

But you people have led on this issue from the very beginning. You like this bill as it is. You're basically begging us. You're telling us you'll stand on your head in the corner and spit nickels to have it passed.

Let's all be heroes. Would you agree that it's time for us to put all this political bickering behind us, time for nobody to grandstand? This is not grandstanding. This is a chance for all of us to be heroes. Would you like to see that at the end of the day?

Ms. Melynda Jarratt: Yes, I would. Yes.

The Chair: Order.

You have one minute and five seconds left.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, I would ask you to check the blues before the next committee meeting, so it doesn't go over your head, for the original question that was—

The Chair: Order, please.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair—

Mr. Don Chapman: Mr. Doyle, do you want me to answer that question?

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Chapman.

Mr. Don Chapman: It reminds me once again of flying airplanes, when somebody sees the landing of an airplane and makes the pilots all out to be heroes, but they say really that in fact they just did their jobs. The job of all parliamentarians, the duty of a parliamentarian, is to protect your citizens and to make life better for your citizens. Here is your opportunity to do your job, which you've been elected to do.

Please say yes. Thank you.

Mr. Dave Batters: Do I have any time left, Mr. Chairman?

The Chair: You have 20 seconds, Mr. Batters.

Mr. Dave Batters: Then I will reword that. I'm trying to make all the members of the committee feel really good about themselves. But yes, you would say this is our basic duty. After all this time, after all the reports that Ms. Chow talked about, you would like to see the bill forwarded to the House of Commons ASAP and you would like to see the Liberals agree not to make amendments to it and to pass it as is. Is that correct?

Ms. Melynda Jarratt: I want the process to get moving, and I want to get this bill passed.

Mr. Dave Batters: As is?

Ms. Melynda Jarratt: As is.

Mr. Dave Batters: As is, Mr. Chapman?

The Chair: I'm sure Mr. Telegdi won't mind if I go for a brief question to Mr. Bevilacqua. I won't take it out of your time. Mr. Bevilacqua wanted a question.

● (1705)

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan, Lib.): It's actually more of a comment, Mr. Chairman.

I think there is a willingness to follow due process in this committee. In fairness to Mr. Karygiannis' requisition of statistics, I don't think that's a difficult thing to provide, and that should be done, as well as bringing the bill to the House, if you really want to move on this thing very quickly.

Second, Mr. Batters, as far as being a hero is concerned, it's okay, I'm happy being a member of Parliament. I don't have to be a hero; I just want to do my job, and that's also the feeling we have here.

But I think we're beginning to develop common ground that can result in a very positive situation for the three people who have so eloquently presented to this committee.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bevilacqua.

Mr. Telegdi, for five minutes, please.

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

As I said, we've had a lot of posturing regarding this bill. We have the problem that Mr. Janzen talks about, that more and more Canadians of second generation are being lost. Now these folks will get something that nobody else will ever get. On the other hand, we have a situation where war brides are dying and their children are going without services.

It is important for everybody to understand that we have to do due diligence on the bill, and I'll give you one example. If you have a first-generation Canadian born abroad and all of a sudden they have to sponsor their kids, who might be 17, 18, or 19 years old, if they are medically inadmissible they might not get into the country. So you want to be careful that you don't create other lost Canadians. Also, there are other people who have the right to come forward to make presentations on the bill, and we have to listen to them.

We cannot, as members of committee, commit that there won't be a discussion of the bill. If we hear something to the effect that a child would be medically inadmissible, none of you would want that.

Mr. Don Chapman: Correct.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: We don't want those kinds of things to happen, so we have to do due diligence on the bill. But I think it's time for us to fish or cut bait.

There's a procedure in Parliament, and we can't move anywhere until we have the bill in front of the committee.

Since we all seem to be in agreement that we want to get this bill passed, I ask for unanimous consent that we pass a motion and table it as a report, calling on the government to give the bill to the committee so we can get to work on it and we can spend the necessary time on it—extra time if need be—so we can get it done.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Without amendments.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: We cannot do unparliamentary things. It just doesn't work that way, Mr. Komarnicki. There are rules and procedures in Parliament. We cannot give up our parliamentary responsibilities.

So I'm asking for unanimous consent, from all members of the committee, that we table a report asking the government to table Bill C-37 so this committee can officially start working on a bill that is in front of us.

I hope we all agree on this, and I hope we then spend the time to make sure we get the best possible bill out of this and that there are no unintended consequences that might result from the bill itself.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, if I may—

The Chair: Are you splitting your time?

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: No. I asked for—

The Chair: This is a motion you're asking for?

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: —unanimous consent.

The Chair: Order, please.

We have a motion before the committee, and I guess we will have discussion on the motion.

Mr. Komarnicki, do you have a comment?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Can we have the motion read?

The Chair: Yes, very good.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: It is that we unanimously pass a motion that we're calling on the government to table the bill as quickly as possible so that it comes in front of this committee, that it be sent to this committee; we want that reported to the House immediately, and we want to get to work on it.

Fish or cut bait.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Can I propose—

The Chair: You've heard the motion. For discussion of the motion, let's do this in an orderly fashion. I have several hands here. The clerk is taking note of that for discussion of the motion.

● (1710)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I'm asking for an amendment.

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: I have a point of order.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: No, just a minute. I started—

The Chair: A point of order takes precedence over the motion.

Mr. St-Cyr.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: The witnesses who are on the agenda were asked a number of questions. Before we debate the motion, I think we should be sure there are no more questions. I, personally, do not have any, and I think we have pretty well covered it.

If there are no further questions, I would suggest that we release our witnesses, who are not required to witness what goes on here, which does not always present us in a positive light.

[*English*]

The Chair: I think that's a very good point.

Would you be in favour of having the witnesses dismissed now? The witnesses can take their seats at the back, if they wish, and we can get into doing the motion that needs to be done.

Mr. Telegdi.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Prior to the witnesses leaving...very quickly, do you agree with the course of action that we just proposed in the motion?

The Chair: Since we're into discussion now, I'm going to go to final wrap-up comments of witnesses, and then we'll entertain Mr. Telegdi's motion. How's that? Fine?

Ms. Chow, do you have a comment first? No? Okay.

Mr. Don Chapman: Since we were on the issue of heroes, I have to say there were two real outstanding heroes through all these years—because I've been doing this an awfully long time. One of them is John Reynolds, and one of them is Andrew Telegdi. Without those two people, we would not be here today.

Along the way, over these years, we've added others. Meili Faille has been fabulous, and Bill Siksay as well.

So I want to thank this committee for doing this. It seems that every time we come, we have a lot of contention, but thank you. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Chapman, Ms. Jarratt, and Mr. Janzen, for your comments here today.

I detect that Ms. Jarratt has something she is very anxious to say—briefly.

Ms. Melynda Jarratt: I resent the tension between the political parties. It's like World War II. The Allies banded together, and you had people from many different countries, from many different political stripes, who banded together to fight one common enemy. They got together on D-Day, and they stormed the beaches, and they got the job done. Out of that, we have thousands and thousands of Canadian veterans, many of whom are the fathers and husbands of war brides, and the fathers of these children.

We need to see the end to this. I really can't believe we're getting this far and these issues are coming up. I really want to see the end of this.

The Chair: I'm sure we all do. Thank you, Ms. Jarratt.

I think I'll go to the last wrap-up comments.

Mr. Janzen, you're finished?

Now, Mr. Carrier, you have a comment before the witnesses go? [*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier: I would simply like to thank Mr. Chapman for the delicious oranges he gave us. I really appreciated the gesture. [*English*]

Mr. Don Chapman: I have a few left over, but I'm afraid the committee could really fight over them.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chapman, Mr. Janzen, and Ms. Jarratt. Thank you very much.

We'll dismiss our witnesses—

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: Thank you. That's very much in order.

We'll go back to Mr. Telegdi, who has a motion on the floor asking for unanimous consent. Did you all get what the motion was?

Some hon. members: Yes.

The Chair: Okay, so now on that, we'll go to Mr. Komarnicki for discussion of it, and then over to Ms. Chow.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Chair, it's not discussion. I raised my hand to say I want to propose an amendment that says everything he said, with the words “without amendment”, and I ask that this question be debated or put to a vote.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, Mr. Telegdi had unanimous consent on his motion.

An hon. member: He did not.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I have to consent to it, and I was thinking of making an amendment to the motion.

The Chair: No, I didn't call the motion yet.

An hon. member: What was the amendment?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: When there's an amendment to the motion, you have to deal with the amendment.

The Chair: An amendment is—

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: With all due respect, why do you study a bill?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: It doesn't matter. I'm saying my amendment is in order. You can vote on it.

Mr. Blair Wilson (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Ind.): That's what we're here for.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: We can vote on it.

An hon. member: The study days are over.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Dave asked for it to be passed as is.

The Chair: You've heard the amendment. I'm forced on order to go to the amendment.

● (1715)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chairman, I don't think you're conducting the meeting right, sir. Andrew asked for unanimous consent to propose a bill. Whether he has that unanimous consent—that's what you have to ask, sir.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I can amend a motion.

The Chair: He can amend a motion.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Mr. Chair, I really said let's fish or cut bait. You cannot do what the parliamentary secretary wants, because it's unparliamentary.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Chair.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Mr. Chair, you cannot have the government...it's totally unparliamentary—

The Chair: Order, please.

Mr. Telegdi, order.

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

The Chair: Order.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Point of order.

The Chair: Order.

People have asked me recently why I have been losing my temper sometimes, but I can't seem to get order on this committee. Now, I'm going to go to the clerk to give me some advice on this, and then we will move on to whether we go with the motion to ask for unanimous consent, or the amendment is going to be in order first.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I will withdraw my amendment.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Ms. Chow.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Could I clarify, just to be very precise, as a point of order?

Because it normally takes 48 hours or 24 hours to present a motion, we can unanimously agree that the motion will be tabled. The motion in front of us is on whether we agree that the motion can be tabled. We're not voting necessarily on the motion itself, right? I'm supporting it all, but just to be clear, that's what we're voting for?

Thank you.

The Chair: Right. Mr. Telegdi has asked for unanimous consent on his motion. Does he have unanimous consent—

An hon. member: Yes, he does.

Some hon. members: To table the motion now.

The Chair: —to table the motion now?

Ms. Olivia Chow: Then we'll debate the motion.

The Chair: So he has unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Yes.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Can you read the motion, Chair?

The Chair: Mr. Clerk, do you have it here?

The Clerk: I need to confirm that I have the right wording from Mr. Telegdi.

Ms. Olivia Chow: I think they will think it is very friendly.

The Chair: [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]...motion officially read into the record.

Order, please.

Do we want to hear the motion? The motion by Mr. Telegdi is that in the opinion of the committee, the government should refer Bill C-37 to our committee as soon as possible, and that the chair report this to the House.

This is what we had unanimous consent for.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Now, I do believe that Ms. Chow wanted to—

Ms. Olivia Chow: I was going to amend it to add in “or for—

The Chair: You wanted to add a deadline.

Ms. Olivia Chow: I wanted a deadline of February 14.

I thought it was very friendly. If other folks don't want it, that's fine. I don't want to move something.... I thought putting a deadline would actually be good, because—

The Chair: Well, this is a report.

Ms. Olivia Chow: “As soon as possible” could be interpreted as June 2008 or it could be—

The Chair: I will bring this report to the House as quickly as possible.

Ms. Olivia Chow: I was trying to tighten up the motion to say “prior to February 14”.

The Chair: Okay, you did it.

Ms. Olivia Chow: But if I don't get any support, I'm not going to do it.

The Chair: Since the business of the committee is finished for this evening, I declare this meeting 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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