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## CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Immigration Applications—  
Express Entry System

Question by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Wednesday, March 25, 2015

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[Translation]

### CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

#### IMMIGRATION APPLICATIONS— EXPRESS ENTRY SYSTEM

**Hon. Claudette Tardif:** Honourable senators, my question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate. In January, Citizenship and Immigration Canada launched the new Express Entry system. Many people were impatiently awaiting the arrival of this new system, but they soon realized that it did not live up to their expectations.

During his appearance before the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, Rory McAlpine, a Senior Vice President at Maple Leaf Foods, explained that the processing sector cannot use the Express Entry system because its jobs are not seasonal and do not require skill type 0 or skill levels A or B, as set out in the National Occupational Classification system. Yesterday in committee, the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council raised the same concerns. The Express Entry system has some serious shortcomings. A number of companies that were hoping to be able to use the system cannot, and they will have to cut productivity as a result.

Will the government commit to working with companies affected by a labour shortage to improve the Express Entry system without delay?

**Hon. Claude Carignan (Leader of the Government):** Senator, as you know, that is what we are continuously doing. We are working with companies to create wealth and jobs. When it comes to immigration and the recent reform, the goal is to match individuals' skills with companies' needs, and that is what we will continue to do.

You also know that the Minister of Finance will table Economic Action Plan 2015 in the coming weeks. I am certain that you will find therein an expression of the government's intention to continue to move forward with that philosophy and vision, which are focused on developing the economy, creating jobs and creating wealth. I hope that you will join with us to pass that action plan.

**Senator Tardif:** The situation is particularly troubling in Alberta. According to the Parliamentary Budget Officer's report, based on data gathered between 2002 and 2012, temporary foreign workers make up a larger portion of the labour force in Alberta than in the other provinces. Temporary foreign workers account for 3.03 per cent of Alberta's labour force, which is nearly twice the national average of 1.79 per cent. Most of those temporary foreign workers work in low-skill jobs and therefore do not qualify for the Express Entry system.

What does the government plan to do to help businesses in Alberta find the workers that they so desperately need?

**Senator Carignan:** As I said, senator, our government has always been very clear about the fact that Canadians must always be first in line for jobs, and our message will not change. Our reforms of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program and its original purpose ensure that it serves as a limited, last-resort, short-term measure. Under the program, when employers can't find enough skilled Canadian workers to fill job vacancies, they must demonstrate that they tried to recruit candidates among young Canadians and other under-represented groups before recruiting foreign workers. Whenever possible, as you mentioned, the Express Entry system can be used. Everything is in place to ensure that Canadians can find work and that employers can get help from outside Canada when workers are not available within the Canadian population.

**Senator Tardif:** Yesterday evening, the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council told us that there is a shortfall of 35,000 jobs in Canada every year. This is having a serious impact on the productivity and competitiveness of businesses in the agricultural sector. We need to take this situation seriously. The government needs to come up with a strategy to meet those needs.

I want to come back to the issue of the Express Entry system for francophones. On February 5, I asked you a question about the fact that the Express Entry system did not include a francophone component that promotes francophone communities outside Quebec. In the meantime, on March 9, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration attended a day of reflection on francophone immigration organized by the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne. The Express Entry system was the focus of the discussions. In response to the federation president's questions, the minister said he hoped to announce something within the year.

When will the government incorporate a francophone component into the Express Entry system?

**Senator Carignan:** Senator, as you probably heard straight from the minister's mouth, we committed to promoting francophone immigration across Canada through a permanent immigration program. As of January 1, applications are processed in six months or less with the new Express Entry system. It is my understanding that the minister has taken part in consultations, as you said, to see how we can attract more of the best and brightest francophone immigrants to help Canada meet its workforce and economic needs.

I trust the minister. He will continue to develop policies and make decisions that will create wealth and attract targeted people to help our businesses and improve immigration.

• (1350)

**Senator Tardif:** The question is: When? Allow me to read an excerpt from a letter I received from a family in Alberta.

This is our story. We are Parisians who arrived in Edmonton on August 27, 2012. I had an open permit, my husband had a one-year visitor's permit and my seven- and nine-year-old sons had study permits.

In January 2015, we became eligible to apply for permanent residence. Therefore, we submitted the application on January 24, 2015. It was at that point that we realized that the Express Entry system puts us at a serious disadvantage. We received a reply informing us that we were eligible for permanent residence under the Canadian experience class with 253 points. Citizenship and Immigration Canada does not take into consideration my husband's experience as a warehouse supervisor because he secured his job one year earlier without the famous LMO, which is now a requirement. Therefore, we lost 600 points that could have led to our receiving an invitation to submit documentation in order to obtain permanent residence.

Will the immigration department take into consideration the two and a half years we have spent in Canada or will they be considered lost years? Should my husband, my three children and I pack our bags for Paris?

We had dreams of opening a Parisian-style bistro selling baked goods and pastries, but this is now just wishful thinking. We are now living in a nightmare.

Yes, it is true that the Express Entry system is a much faster system. However, for some, the unintended consequences are catastrophic. Our family is living on borrowed time as our work permit expires in July 2016.

Leader, what will we do for these families who want to contribute to Canadian society by choosing to become Canadian citizens?

**Senator Carignan:** Senator, you know that we do not typically comment on specific cases in the Senate during Question Period. In the Roadmap for Canada's Official Languages 2013-2018, we committed to working on education, immigration and communities. Citizenship and Immigration Canada is investing \$29.4 million to support official language minority communities, and the Government of Canada is funding 13 francophone immigration networks across the country, except in Quebec and Nunavut. These networks bring together key stakeholders with the goal of working together to increase francophone immigration in the targeted communities. There are many resources in place to provide support for immigration, and especially francophone immigration, which is highly valued, as you know.

**Senator Tardif:** Mr. Leader, representatives from the Réseau en immigration francophone de l'Alberta, located in Edmonton, have told me that there are five or six cases similar to this one.

When will there be changes to the Express Entry system to enable these francophone families to integrate into Canadian society?

**Senator Carignan:** Senator, as I said, we are working continuously to ensure that Canadian employers can hire skilled workers. As I explained to you, francophone immigration is highly valued, and as the minister has said, we will continue to work to meet our labour market and economic needs and support this type of immigration.

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