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## **BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION BILL, 2008**

**Third Reading of Bill C-50**

**Speech by:**

**The Honourable Vivienne Poy**

**Tuesday, June 17, 2008**

## THE SENATE

Tuesday, June 17, 2008

### BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION BILL, 2008

#### THIRD READING

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Stratton, seconded by the Honourable Senator Nolin, for the third reading of Bill C-50, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on February 26, 2008 and to enact provisions to preserve the fiscal plan set out in that budget.

**Hon. Vivienne Poy:** Honourable senators, I rise today to voice my objection to the inclusion of legislative measures in Bill C-50 that have no direct relationship to budget implementation.

Today, I will only speak to Part 6 of the bill, which deals with the amendments to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, which should be introduced as stand-alone legislation. In inserting this section, the government shows contempt for our parliamentary process by not allowing for sufficient public input and parliamentary debate. I may be repeating a few points that have been covered, and I beg honourable senators for your patience.

• (1620)

As a member of the Chinese-Canadian community, a group that has been singled out in the past for exclusionary immigration measures, I am concerned that this legislation gives the minister excessive discretionary power, with a lack of openness, consultation and transparency that removes objectivity from our immigration system. What has happened in history could happen again. Certain groups and those from certain countries can be excluded easily when immigration is dependent upon the discretion of the minister, as was mentioned by the honourable senator earlier.

When the point system was introduced in 1967, racial bias was finally removed when foreign nationals applied for immigration to Canada. Based upon this system, Canada has become the diverse country it is today. The amendments inserted in Part 6 of Bill C-50 will politicize immigration, leaving it open to lobbying by special interest groups and subject to third-party agendas.

I acknowledge that there are problems with Canada's present immigration system, such as the backlog, as well as the need for foreign credentials recognition. The point system should also be re-evaluated. However, changes to the system should not be introduced arbitrarily, buried within a budget implementation bill.

Because of the importance of immigration to Canada's future, with Canada potentially being totally dependent on immigrants for all net labour-force growth by 2011, which is only three years away, we must have a comprehensive strategy and separate legislation for such significant amendments to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. Legislation should be drafted only after adequate and appropriate public consultations. Instead, the

government introduces measures without proper consultation or debate in Parliament.

Because these changes are so controversial, the government has found it necessary to spend millions of dollars of taxpayers' money in buying advertisements in ethnic media in an attempt to convince ethnic communities that their justifiable fears about the outcomes of these changes are misplaced. The government has created a climate of mistrust and apprehension by not being transparent or accountable and by refusing to consult adequately with stakeholders.

It is no surprise that, at the many events I attend across Canada, organizations and individuals tell me that they are worried about what these changes could mean. One of their fears is the potential for the reduction of the importance of family reunification since the minister can adjust certain immigration categories and abstain from processing applications received even after February 27, 2008, as well as prioritize others. This change is widely expected to mean more emphasis on economic immigrants and temporary foreign workers, and less on other categories such as the family class. In particular, the current trend seems to be towards temporary foreign workers, which serves the needs of the business lobby rather than that of immigrant communities, of labour, and of Canadian society as a whole.

One reason multiculturalism works in Canada is that immigrants have an attachment to this country. This country is where families become established and help to build our future. Those who come in are not just passing through as temporary workers, as they are in many parts of Europe. Emphasis on temporary foreign workers, instead of immigrants of all categories, may change Canadian society, which could easily lead to future social unrest.

The government claims that they will reduce the backlog through these measures, but the backlog, as Senator Day mentioned earlier, can be reduced only by providing more resources and deploying more staff in processing applications in locations where the waits are the longest. These amendments will not reduce the backlog, since they apply only to applications made on or after February 27, 2008. In fact, those in the current system could find themselves waiting even longer, depending on the decisions of the minister.

The minister has said that the process will be transparent because the instructions will be published in the government's paper, the *Canada Gazette*, on the department's website and in its annual report to Parliament, but this publication will be done only after the fact. Therefore, it is of no use to interested parties.

The minister has indicated that one of the groups she will prioritize as immigrants is doctors. However, we all know there are many doctors, as well as other skilled workers, who are already in Canada but not working in their fields because of the restrictions around foreign credentials recognition in the provinces. These issues can be resolved only by working with the provinces and the various professional organizations and not by giving discretionary powers to the minister. In the case of doctors, even those who have passed the test in Canada cannot

find residency positions in our hospitals because these positions are so limited, so they are unable to work in their fields. For the present, we do not need more doctors coming to Canada. We first need to help those who are already here to have a chance to use their skills to look after the health of Canadians.

The existing open and transparent criteria have been the secret of Canada's success on immigration. The present amendments in Part 6 of Bill C-50 put too much discretionary power in the hands of the minister who can pick and choose who comes to Canada.

This discretionary power will open the door to abuse of that power. It is a recipe for political problems and has the potential to undermine public support for immigration.

In addition, when there is a global competition for the best and the brightest in the world, it will make talented individuals think twice about emigrating to Canada, where the rules are ambiguous. It will also undermine Canada's international reputation as an immigrant-welcoming country, which is so crucial to our future.

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