

Immigration gets boost

BY FRED SIMPSON
Staff Writer

Canada's immigration system is being attacked from all sides, especially by the federal minister responsible for it.

Thornhill MP Elinor Caplan took the gloves off recently when she pledged to cut through red tape and inefficiency to allow Canada to meet its target of attracting between 200,000 and 225,000 newcomers next year.

"People want to come but we're not able to process the applications quickly enough," she said. "We are competing with the world for the best and the brightest," she added. "We want them to come to Canada."

Jim Chalk, a Thornhill immigration counsellor, said it's about time somebody tried to reform the system, which he bluntly described as "an absolute mess."

He puts a major part of the blame for the backlog of applications on designated immigration officers holding down visa post jobs overseas.

We have had enough of the procrastination and dragging of heels.

"These offices are locally staffed by people who know nothing about Canada and often have a negative attitude toward their own kind," he said.

"They have got to be replaced by Canadian citizens making decisions on behalf of Canada. We have had enough of the procrastination and dragging of heels by these designated officers who don't know what they are doing."

He cited the example of a European business man who received the blessing of a senior immigration officer in his initial application to move to Canada.

But things got bogged down when the applica-



ELINOR CAPLAN: Aims to bring in at least 200,000 immigrants and 25,000 refugees next year.

tion was passed to minor clerks for processing.

"These people simply didn't know what they were doing," he said. "They kept coming back and asking for stupid things that had no relevance to the application whatsoever."

The application is still waiting to be approved after seven months and, in the meantime, "this person's life is on hold and we are losing someone who is willing to spend millions of dollars in this country."

In some cases the wait can be up to three years, he said.

"There are many examples of people with no intention of staying in Canada who can't get in to visit relatives, to go to a wedding, or a funeral," he said. "If we don't move fast on this we are going to miss out."

Caplan said Canada will rely on its immigrants more in the future.

"It is a country that continues to thrive and prosper because of their hard work. With our birth rate, an aging workforce and an increasingly global marketplace, immigration is essential to maintaining Canada's place as a leader in the economy of the 21st century."

In the coming year, Caplan pledged to take all possible measures to meet the overall planning range of 200,000 immigrants and 25,000 refugees.

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