

PROTESTS SURROUND CANADIAN IMMIGRATION PROPOSALS

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Body

Proposed sweeping changes to **immigration** laws allowing the **Canadian** government to fast-track desired applicants have been met by noisy **protests**.

Protesters outside a Toronto hotel where hearings were being held on the **proposed** bill said the changes would give the government too much power to hand-pick who is admitted.

Immigration Minister Diane Finley said it would help speed things for skilled workers that Canada needs and set priorities and limits on the types of immigrants who can enter the country.

There is a priority to deal with a huge backlog of 800,000 applicants, and the bill could eventually help speed things up for all types of immigrants, she said.

The bill would also allow the government to reject a would-be immigrant who has been ruled admissible by **immigration** officers.

Liberal Member of Parliament David McGuinty said the Conservative government is intent on "closing Canada's doors to the newcomers we desperately need to fuel our labor and our population growth even though history shows this is absolutely the wrong approach."

Sima Zerehi, of No One Is Illegal, said the **immigration** department would become a temporary work agency so the government could "cherry-pick immigrants from any country ... they want."

Blizzard leads to record

After an extended winter, Calgary rolled back spring with a 10-inch snowfall Thursday.

The blizzard set a snowfall record for the date and caused traffic chaos and flights to be delayed or canceled at Calgary International Airport.

Commuters said their 30-minute treks to work and home ended up taking two or three hours in some cases.

The previous spring snowfall record was 6 inches in 1920.

News in brief

-Vancouver's Olympic flame could have an overseas run, but it will mainly be a cross-Canada relay leading to the 2010 Winter Games. Organizers said consideration is being given to a stop at Vimy Ridge, France, the site of a major military offensive by **Canadian** troops during World War I. Current **protests** over the Beijing torch have caused a review of future flame relays from Greece to the host nations.

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-Member of Parliament Todd Russell is joining the seal hunt getting under way in his province of Newfoundland and Labrador in a show of support for the sealing industry. Thousands of vessels are taking part in the hunt in the Gulf of St. Lawrence despite international **protests**.

-Feuding finance ministers will meet to discuss the downturn in Ontario's economy, caused by manufacturing and export cutbacks to the United States. Federal Finance Minister Jim Flaherty has publicly attacked his Ontario counterpart, Dwight Duncan, for failing to cut taxes for businesses to spur a turnaround. They have agreed to meet to discuss their differences.

Facts and figures

Canada's dollar has retreated over the past week to 97.78 cents U.S. while the U.S. greenback rose to \$1.0227 **Canadian**, before bank exchanges fees.

The Bank of Canada's key interest rate remains steady at 4 percent while the prime lending rate is 5.75 percent.

Canadian stock markets moved higher with the Toronto Exchange index at 13,714 points, while the TSX Venture Exchange was at 2,556 points on Friday.

Lotto 6-49: (Wednesday) 20, 21, 22, 29, 39, 41; bonus 25. (April 5) 16, 18, 21, 27, 36, 43; bonus 44. Super 7: (April 4) 8, 15, 25, 27, 31, 37, 43; bonus 19.

Regional briefs

-Police said a distraught separated father is the prime suspect in the murders of his three children in Merritt, British Columbia. Allan Schoenborn hasn't been seen since the discovery of the bodies of Kaitlyne, 10, Max, 8, and Cordon, 5, in their home April 6.

-A 17-year-old student was killed Wednesday when a truck slammed into the back of a stopped school bus near Rimbey, Alberta. Jennifer Dawn Noble was killed on the foggy highway, and several students were hurt.

-Manitoba's government is cutting some taxes but increasing user fees in its budget. There is a new environmental tax on coal-burning businesses to encourage them to go green. Health-care spending will increase by \$350-million to hire more doctors and nurses, improve services and increase spending for child care.

-The squeamish should not look down while riding the elevator at Toronto's CN Tower. As one of the tallest freestanding structures, it now has the "world's highest glass-floor elevator." It provides a new perspective on the city - 1,135 feet straight down - through two glass-floor panels.

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