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Export date: Sat Oct 31 17:27:23 2026 / +0000 GMT

?Mr. Tilson will not be responding? ? taking praise but not the heat

During recent Dufferin Federal Debates, Conservative MP incumbent David Tilson was quick to garner praise for his role as the Chair of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration which mandates and manages immigration. And when the Shelburne Free Press requested a photo and information for his election profile last month, Mr. Tilson happily responded without issue. However, when the Free Press turned up the heat on Mr. Tilson regarding his role in the recent revelations by the Globe and Mail on the undisclosed, albeit temporary, shut down of the processing of Syrian refugees by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) ? the answer was: ?Mr. Tilson will not be responding.?

These are the questions the Free Press asked Mr. Tilson regarding the issue:

? (As Chair of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and immigration) What is your responsibility?

? How do you explain this temporary, but unorthodox shut down occurring without full disclosure to the Canadian people?

? Did you disclose this information to your constituents ? especially the members of the Dufferin Community Refugee Sponsorship Group who have been working for many months to bring a Syrian family to Ontario?

?Mr. Tilson will not be responding.?

Brain Logel, lead for the Dufferin Community Refugee Sponsorship Group, was asked if Conservative MP Tilson, who attends church with some of the group's members, informed them about the temporary shut-down and take over of Syrian refugee processing by the PMO which could potentially affect Canada's immigration targets for Syrian refugees, ?No, we never heard anything,? said Logel.

Logel said the group, which has been working to bring a Syrian family from Jordan for nine months, can not say that the PMO shut down had an effect on their group's progress, but said they experienced frustration when their application was rejected over a technical error, which Logel feels ?could have been over looked.? The group then had to begin the process all over again. ?It was a real challenge getting documents from Jordan a second time,? said Logel, ?as Jordan has no postal process.? He said Immigration Canada ?seems to have no personal sense of a family in danger ? they are not lucky like our families.? The Syrian family the group is trying to bring to Orangeville escaped from war torn Syria four years ago and has been living with three other families in their grandfather's house in Jordan with no means of making a living - refugees are not legally allowed to take employment.

?The whole process should have been beefed up months ago as this crisis has been brewing for four and five years,? said Logel. ?Staff in foreign embassies should have been increased.?

In his profile response to the Shelburne Free Press early in October, MP David Tilson called the premise that the Conservative Government's response to the Syrian refugee crisis was disproportionate ?false.? This new revelation by the Globe and Mail certainly suggests otherwise.

All other candidates in the October 19th Federal election responded to the request for comments on Mr. Tilson's role as the Chair of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration and his responsibility to be transparent to the voters of Dufferin-Caledon on the undisclosed, temporary take over of Syrian refugee immigration by the PMO.

Green Party candidate Nancy Urekar responded:

?Canada is a multicultural society ? almost everyone who lives here came from somewhere else within the last few generations. We have a strong history of welcoming immigrants and celebrating cultural diversity. It seems that the Conservative government at some point stopped the processing of Syrian refugees altogether for a period of time. Surely the chair of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration which mandates and manages immigration has some responsibility in this ? or does the Prime Minister's office control all things now? Is it totally forgotten now that according to the principles of our system of government, Members of Parliament represent their constituents, not their political party; that all MPs are equal, with the Prime Minister first among equals; that the Prime Minister reports to Parliament, not the other way around; and that Parliament controls the public purse. Therefore, if David Tilson, our local MP, in his duty as the Chair of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration has no power, what is the point of even having such a committee? What is the point of an elected representative who boasts about this important job if he cannot even support processing of a population in crisis? If the processing of Syrian refugees is stopped or made so difficult that it is nearly impossible to bring in a sponsored family, do we not need a better representative in Ottawa? Isn't it his job??

NDP candidate Rehya Yazbek responded:

?The Harper government's mishandling of the Syrian refugee crisis gets worse and worse with the revelation by the Globe and Mail that Harper's office secretly shut down the refugee rescue process in order for his political staff to apply a political litmus test to screen Syrian refugees. This follows three years of failure to provide meaningful humanitarian aid and rescue efforts to the millions

fleeing the ravages of Civil War.
Over 4 million Syrians have fled into Turkey and other neighbouring countries.
Dufferin Caledon MP David Tilson has boasted that he chairs the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, but during his term as Chair he evidently managed to be completely oblivious to the greatest humanitarian crisis since World War II.
Despite Canada's noble humanitarian record of providing massive rescue for refugees from Vietnam, Hungary, and Uganda, Mr. Tilson has done absolutely nothing to facilitate a refugee settlement program and instead, he couples every reference to the refugee crisis with the usual Harper fear-mongering that the Syrian refugees could be Islamic terrorists.
Now he apparently has nothing to say about the latest political interference with the already pathetic record of the Harper government on this file.
What is so despicable is that there are thousands of Canadian citizens of Syrian origin who are desperate to rescue members of their own families from the refugee camps. Nothing would seem easier to do than to facilitate a refugee rescue for families related to Canadian citizens. But Harper's government and the Tory dominated Citizenship and Immigration Committee have turned a deaf ear to their pleas. One such Canadian family, whose pleas fell on deaf ears, was, tragically, related to the little boy (three-year-old Aylan Kurdi) whose body was found on the beach. I earnestly hope that the millions of Canadians who are so ashamed of their government's hateful agenda have had enough.?
Liberal Candidate Ed Crewson responded:
?We are all aware that Canada's response to the Syrian refugee crisis has been inadequate given both the scale of the crisis and our country's capacity to help. As the Chairman of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, surely David Tilson knew about the challenges this situation was posing long before they entered the public consciousness. However, it would appear that he did nothing with that knowledge. Chris Alexander blamed the media for his inaction, who will Tilson blame? We need a representative with a fundamentally different approach to service ? one that will be our voice in Ottawa, not merely Stephen Harper's voice in this riding.?

By Marni Walsh