

Canadians pay to erase criminal records in order to visit U.S.

TORONTO, Reuter - A new business is charging Canadians to wipe clean their criminal records to enter the United States, a service

the government provides for free.

Pardon Services Canada charges to process U.S. government waivers and Canadian government pardons forms, billing for a service both governments provide for free.

"They are almost legitimate," said a U.S. consulate spokeswoman. "It's private enterprise. It's not blessed or discouraged by the U.S. government."

Azmairin Jadavji, managing director of Pardon Services Canada, said Monday, "We get pardons for people with criminal records. It is a community service."

Jadavji said his company helps people who are not aware a conviction can stop them from entering foreign countries. He said Canadians with a criminal record can't go to the United States and if they do, "they can have their car confiscated."

The U.S. government waiver allows people with criminal records

to enter the country without risk of arrest or deportation.

The waiver depends on official assessment of the risk to society, the seriousness of previous convictions and the reasons for visiting the U.S. There is no charge although there is a filing fee of \$45 (U.S.).

A Canadian government pardon comes from the Solicitor-General and seals a person's criminal record either five or two years after a sentence is completed, depending on the severity of the crime.

"It doesn't cost. It's a public service," said Clarence Roussel, a spokesman for the National Parole Board.

Pardon Services Canada charges C\$125 (\$108) for a Canadian pardon. The U.S. waiver costs C\$100 (\$86) plus a \$35 (U.S.) fee payable to the U.S. Immigration Service.