

[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FINANCE, TRADE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Eighth report of Standing Committee on Finance, Trade and Economic Affairs, in both official languages—Mr. Comtois.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Fourth report of Standing Committee on Regional Development, in both official languages—Mr. Lumley.

[Editor's note: For texts of above reports, see today's Votes and Proceedings.]

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HEALTH

TABLING OF REPORT OF ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON FOOD SAFETY ASSESSMENT

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I should like to table the report of the Advisory Committee on Food Safety Assessment.

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[English]

BILINGUALISM

TABLING OF REPORT OF SECOND BILINGUAL DISTRICTS ADVISORY BOARD—STATEMENT BY MINISTER

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I should like to table copies in English and in French of the report of the Second Bilingual Districts Advisory Board.

Hon. C. M. Drury (Acting President of Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, I rise for the purpose of making a statement in relation to the report of the Second Bilingual Districts Advisory Board tabled today by the Acting Prime Minister (Mr. Sharp). The report in question is the result of a difficult and painstaking study. Under the chairmanship of Professor Fox, the board conducted its assigned task with unquestionable seriousness and competence, for which the government wishes to express its gratitude.

The findings, conclusions and recommendations contained in the report are those of the board and not of the government. It is now the government's duty to examine the report and to determine what will be done with each recommendation. This process has already been initiated and will be carried out with the utmost diligence. However, the government has adopted a clear position concerning the report. It is this position that I wish to discuss at this juncture, Mr. Speaker.

In line with the observations made by the Commissioner of Official Languages to parliament in his second annual report, the advisory board examined the concept of and the reason for the establishment of bilingual districts. It concluded that the concept should be retained. The government supports this conclusion and will proceed with the proclamation of bilingual districts.

Bilingual Districts

The advisory board proposed that 30 bilingual districts be delineated in accordance with section 13 of the Official Languages Act, in a total of nine provinces, to be distributed as follows: Newfoundland, two districts; Prince Edward Island, one district; Nova Scotia, two districts; New Brunswick, one district—the entire province; Quebec, five districts; Ontario, five districts; Manitoba, six districts; Saskatchewan, six districts; Alberta, two districts.

In each of the districts proposed, at least 10 per cent of all inhabitants speak the minority official language as their mother tongue. As this proportion corresponds to the provisions of the Official Languages Act, these 30 districts appear acceptable in our view. The government will examine the geographic areas delineated by the board; in particular, special attention will be given to the recommendation that the entire province of New Brunswick be made into a federal bilingual district, in terms of the real needs of the various regions of that province.

[Translation]

In the province of Quebec, the advisory board chose to recommend bilingual districts in the five areas only where, in their view, the English-speaking minority might require support and special protection. They therefore left aside certain areas where the official language minority accounts for 10 per cent or more of the population, including the Montreal area, for the reasons that the federal government already provides services there in both official languages, that it will probably never cease to do so and that the proclamation of bilingual districts would be unnecessary. The government does not accept the bases for that reasoning. The principles of the recommendation are not acceptable to us, and the government rejects the board's reasoning and conclusions to reduce in the province of Quebec the number of bilingual districts below the level authorized by the act. The government will therefore review all Quebec areas, including Montreal and Sherbrooke, and certain other areas as Rouyn-Noranda and Schefferville, using the same approach and principles that will apply to the final establishment of boundaries of bilingual districts in other parts of the country. So, Mr. Speaker, there will be one or more bilingual districts in the Montreal area, and there will be others across Quebec, according to the guidelines we intend to follow in other provinces.

[English]

The advisory board deemed it advisable, for which we are grateful, to formulate additional recommendations, the two most important of which relate to the provision of services in both official languages in a number of areas located outside the proposed bilingual districts. Instead of being concerned with the proclamation of bilingual districts, these two recommendations are designed, rather, to give meaning to sections 9(2) and 10 of the Official Languages Act which stipulate that in locations outside federal bilingual districts, government services be made available in both official languages where there is a "significant" demand.

The board therefore proposed that a "significant" demand for services in both official languages be explicitly acknowledged to exist in all the provincial capitals by reason of the fact that many federal offices located in these cities serve the entire province and that visitors are drawn