

Supply

I am not saying that the member is one, but when you suggest that you can save the health care system with the budget that we have for official languages that is distorting the situation.

I will give examples. They could be given in English Canada as well. An elderly anglophone who is close to me went to a hospital, in this case in Quebec but it could happen to a francophone outside Quebec, for health care and could not communicate with the nurses or the doctors in that hospital because nobody could speak English. I know there are many examples on the other side where francophones go to hospitals and they cannot get service in French and they are trying to describe their ailments, which is not easy even if you have a doctor or nurse who speaks your own language.

Therefore, to suggest that it is either one or the other, it is health care or official languages policies or services, is to mislead Canadians. Both are necessary on a basis of justice and social policy. I suggest that you will never save one hospital or one major health care program in this country with the little bitsy budget that we have for official languages.

Mr. Bob Ringma (Nanaimo—Cowichan): Mr. Speaker, I wish to address a couple of points made by the hon. member. One part of the problem is the costs of official languages. The problem is that we do not know what those costs are.

Now we are told \$601 million per year. We are told three cents on every \$100. Frankly, I have received correspondence from the Department of National Defence specifically telling me: "Here is our figure of cost of this thing but we cannot tell all because of Treasury Board rules and regulations".

It is our perception that much of the cost of official languages is hidden somewhere or other. We would really like to unearth it. Perhaps that is the procedure that we can follow in the standing joint committee.

The other point that I would like to address which was made by the hon. member concerns the overall. What is it that we are trying to do here in examining the Official Languages Act? He was taking territorialism as an example and using the example that I was giving and saying that it did not go far enough. I agree. Let us take St. Boniface, Gravelbourg and Maillardville outside of New Westminster as places where it does merit it. Surely what we should be doing is studying the thing and not just rejecting it out of hand and saying the act is good, most people agree with it, therefore let us not look at it.

Please, let us go at it step by step and examine things that come up with a policy that works for all of us.

Mr. Allmand: Mr. Speaker, on his first point, with respect to the true costs, I would agree with him. If the present costs that

are put forward by the government are not the complete costs then let us have the complete costs. I do not think it serves the debate well to have varying versions of the costs.

I do not know whether these costs are the full costs or not but we will have a chance in the committee to tie officials down on that. I think all the costs should be put on the table and then we can judge. I am sure, however, that in comparison to other programs they are still very small as a percentage base compared to health care, social services and so on.

His next point was with respect to what should be the exact definition of where the people demand the services. I was on the official languages committee in 1968-69 for the first act. We spent almost a year on it. I was on the committee in 1988 for the second version and we went through at great length the points that are being raised by the member: How narrow or how wide should the definition be in covering minority language communities? Should you cover Gravelbourg or not cover Gravelbourg? Should you just cover large areas like the east and north of Ontario and leave out, let us say, the Acadian community in Nova Scotia? We went through that for months and months in 1988.

• (1720)

The hon. member and myself are both on the official languages committee and we will have a chance to go through it again. That does not strike to the heart of the legislation, to the principles. Here we are debating how wide or how narrow, that concept of which populations should be served and where, how big that should be before we give the services. We will have a chance to go at that.

It comes also to a question of justice. Take the eastern townships as an example. There is a majority of francophones in the eastern townships now but the first Europeans to come to that part of Quebec were anglophones who fled from the United States to towns like Cowansville, Knowlton and Frelighsburg. I have lived there. I lived in Sherbrooke. They built a university there and they built colleges; Stanstead, Bishop's, Compton Hall and so on. Now it is mostly French speaking. Are we to leave these people out altogether with these long historic rights? That is a very important question.

We studied it before and we will study it again.

[Translation]

Mr. Ronald J. Duhamel (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Public Works and Government Services): Mr. Speaker, as a francophone member from Western Canada, I am pleased and honoured to speak on this motion.