

Illiteracy

the Government has opted for a concerted approach. For solutions that are worthwhile, the public sector, business, labour and government agencies must work together on long-term activities. Hence the co-operative research I mentioned earlier.

I am very pleased to announce to the House that during the past two or three months, the Government has taken a number of steps to encourage partnership with the provinces and the territories. A few examples, Madam Speaker: in British Columbia, the federal Government has allocated \$100,000 for advanced teaching and professional training activities, in particular the creation of a residence for adult students, the development of a special form of supervised teaching, consultation with native people on the subject and funding a conference for adult students.

In Newfoundland, the federal Government spent \$80,000 to set up a literacy policy office, for volunteer seminars and to organize a provincial literacy conference.

In the Northwest Territories, the federal Government has granted \$50,000 for a continuing education conference.

In Quebec, the federal Government has granted \$111,000 to set up a literacy data base, to investigate research requirements and for a study of literacy teacher training needs.

In Saskatchewan, the federal Government has allocated \$75,000 for the activities of the new provincial literacy council, including a public awareness campaign, production of teaching material and development of a training program.

In New Brunswick, the federal Government has earmarked \$100,000 for the production of teaching material in French to take account of the cultural characteristics of the population and for other literacy-related activities.

In Alberta, the federal Government has awarded \$101,987 for the production of informational and promotional material, for a program to train people who teach illiterate adults and for professional development seminars.

In Prince Edward Island, the federal Government spent \$80,000 on various projects, including public awareness, a study of the programs that would best meet the needs of the province's francophones, the establishment of networks of volunteer tutors and a training program.

Finally, in Manitoba, the federal Government granted \$100,000 for a series of initiatives to develop effective literacy approaches for native peoples.

Madam Speaker, those are but a few examples of the numerous activities the Government has undertaken jointly with the provinces and territories in order to fight this disaster. Other federal-provincial initiatives are currently under way or being completed.

Twenty one years ago, Madam Speaker, during Expo 67, Canada proclaimed the first World Literacy Day. In 1985, we sponsored the right to learn declaration during the World

Conference on Continuing Education which took place in Paris under the auspices of UNESCO. Partly because of this initiative, the United Nations General Assembly decided to call 1990 the World Literacy Year.

The Canadian Government intends to mark this international year with special events at the national level and to pursue its leadership role on the international scene, while maintaining its efforts to upgrade education levels throughout the world.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, I wish to underline that the national literacy secretariat, in conjunction with the provinces and community organizations, has taken the right direction. I believe that the best way to deal with literacy in Canada is by letting the secretariat continue its work, and by postponing the examination of the proposal concerning the creation of a special committee of the House.

[English]

Mr. Joe Reid (St. Catharines): Madam Speaker, did you know that over 4 million Canadians are finding it difficult to read and write, so baffling indeed that they are unable to cope with the problem. I ask Members in the House to think of what it means to be unable to read, unable to circle the expiry date of a drivers licence, read the label of a medicine bottle, or even sign the bottom of a SIN certificate.

• (1740)

Those are not my examples. They come from Creative Research Group Limited which was commissioned by Southam News to find out just how many Canadians can read and write. That study found that 3 per cent of those surveyed could not circle the expiry date on a driver's license, 8 per cent could not read the instructions on a medicine bottle and 9 per cent could not sign their names to a Social Insurance card. Southam News reported extensively on the results of the survey last Fall, and many Canadians became conscious for the first time of the previously hidden problem of illiteracy.

I commend the Hon. Member for Winnipeg North (Mr. Orlikow) for bringing this very serious problem before the House. I do not particularly agree with the Hon. Member's solution, however. He recommends that we form a special committee to join with the provinces and the territories in the United Nations attack on illiteracy. This Government has already mounted that attack. It is very much aware of the seriousness of the problem. The Hon. Member's motion may be well intentioned, but a special committee of this House could perhaps overlap and even delay the work that is now going on.

Support is being given now as it has in the past to community based literacy initiatives by the Department of the Secretary of State. While the Hon. Member for Winnipeg North calls this a small effort, the Solicitor General has been increasing steadily and progressively the emphasis on literacy for those in the federal prison system, and encouraging results are being obtained.