

• (1255)

Having worked in the world of diplomacy and international relations I can assure you that questioning the whole official languages policy amounts to ignorance of today's world. Markets are joining together to form large economic units that will in the future set the rules of the game. Developments in information technology such as satellite rebroadcasting have radically altered the concept of space and time.

The success of our country is closely linked to our ability to communicate in the languages and appreciate the cultures of other people. In a world where an estimated 6,000 languages are spoken in some 200 countries, Canada is not alone in having more than one official language. Having two world-class official languages can only be of net advantage to us because no fewer than 25 of those countries have French as an official language and 33 English.

Apart from being personally enriching, knowing both official languages makes our country better able to build up commercial relations with various countries. It is no surprise that our main competitors such as Japan and Europe are attaching increasing importance to teaching second languages in their schools. They are making the change to a modern world. Should we not?

The official languages question however is not solely confined to financial aspects. Linguistic duality is one of our fundamental characteristics as a society, as attested by our common history. Seeing that about 96 per cent of the population has French or English as its first language, no one can deny the coexistence of the two main languages in this country.

At a time when spending is being cut some ask whether we should not simply abolish the official languages policy. Others persist in bringing up the cost of the official languages policy and do not pay attention to its true value.

[*Translation*]

For my part, I am quite convinced that, more than ever, we must promote the use and promotion of both official languages and make sure that they are taught throughout Canada. The key to the development of any minority community, and our country as a whole, is education. All the efforts, energy and time spent by francophones to take control of their own schools must come to fruition.

Through special measures regarding management and post-secondary education, we have made progress on issues of priority concern to francophones, and we intend to continue in that direction. We will work towards fostering the economic development of francophone communities, which will require the participation of other departments and agencies.

Supply

I intend to call upon my colleagues to promote both official languages, which is part of my mandate as Minister of Canadian Heritage. We must renew our partnership with official languages communities and revamp our approach. Finally, I am looking into exploring new and fairly novel avenues which would give these communities almost unlimited opportunities, not only internally, but also internationally; I am thinking, in particular, about the information highway and the whole field of telecommunications.

Why not use the information highway to offer and diversify education services to francophones in remote areas? Could we not take advantage of this new technology to set up a French-language network for francophones, thus giving them their own electronic space? Those are questions I intend to explore with my colleagues and associates. I want to look at the future, and at how the official languages can contribute to the full development of Canada. But I am already convinced that having two official languages is an undeniable asset for our culture and our presence on the world scene.

• (1300)

Mr. Pierre de Savoye (Portneuf): Mr. Speaker, the Reform Party has put a motion before the House today, and for the benefit of our listeners, I would like to start by reading the motion and then comment on a number of aspects I feel are particularly important and which I think each and every one of us should give some serious thought. The motion reads as follows:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should:

- (a) amend the Official Languages Act to reflect the philosophy of "territorial bilingualism", which holds that French should be the predominant language of Quebec and English the predominant language of the other provinces, and that federal government services should be available to official language minorities in their own language in any part of the country where there is demonstrable local public demand;
- (b) continue to facilitate the use of English or French in the debates and other proceedings of Parliament, in the records and journals of Parliament, in federal courts, and as the languages of federal legislation; and
- (c) refrain from spending monies on those aspects of language which fall under the sole jurisdiction of the provinces.

Mr. Speaker, when this motion was presented by the Reform Party, the mover of the motion said, and I quote:

[*English*]

—the Official Languages Act is not working well.

[*Translation*]

I agree with what he said. In fact, I believe the Commissioner of Official Languages himself pointed out that the legislation was not as effective as one would expect it to be.

The hon. member for the Reform Party went on to say that this act—