

The Budget

How expensive is it? I do not know. It is almost impossible to find the real cost, but let us look at one example. National Defence admits official languages program activities cost nearly \$48 million in fiscal 1992-93. Yet nowhere in the 1992-93 public accounts for National Defence is that figure recorded. It is buried somewhere.

In fact the person who prepared the report on official languages cost in National Defence to send to my office said in his covering letter: "The true costs of official languages activities for DND are higher than those given in the enclosed fax sheet. Unfortunately Treasury Board reporting guidelines do not permit us to report, among other things, salaries of military personnel attending continuous language training and the bilingualism bonus for civilian employees". That is part of the problem of identifying costs.

Let me conclude by saying that the budget should be tackling the deficit. One way of attacking the deficit is to cut expenditures, especially in areas where it is creating division in the country. One such area is the Official Languages Act. I say to the government: "Please look at it and cut".

• (1815)

[Translation]

Mr. Dan McTeague (Ontario): Mr. Speaker, I must point out as a Franco-Ontarian that during the 1960s and 1970s, I had a chance to learn a second language. I learned another language, and I want to make this clear to the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan, thanks to the institution of bilingualism. During my school years and when I was employed in the private sector—

[English]

I had an opportunity to work with several large firms in this country which acknowledge readily that official bilingualism is a lot easier when you put, for instance, English on one side of the Kellogg's box and French on the same side. It is far more efficient to try to communicate to the seven, eight or nine million people in this nation who do speak French and who are not confined to one single region of the country.

[Translation]

I am living testimony to a system that works, a system that helped me learn a second language. I hope the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan will agree that having two official languages was one of the great things that happened to this country, and that it gives us, as Canadians, an edge in our business dealings.

Mr. Ringma: Mr. Speaker, I am delighted the hon. member learned to speak English and French. It is a good thing for this country, and I certainly agree with him. However, I maintain what I said in my speech, that a tremendous amount of money is being wasted in this country. You are an example of someone who learned both languages, and that is wonderful. However, I

can assure you that, although they agree with the principle of learning both official languages and other languages as well, most people in Western Canada feel that money is being wasted, and I repeat what I said in my speech in this respect.

The Deputy Speaker: I would ask hon. members, whether they speak English or French, to address the Chair.

[English]

Mr. Ronald J. Duhamel (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Public Works and Government Services): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member wants to know about costs for the official languages policy of this country, there is no policy on official bilingualism. I would be delighted to share with him an article that I published on that very subject matter which outlines those costs. No one has ever challenged them.

With respect to the comments that he has made about costs, it is those kinds of things that are said that exaggerate the fears that are found throughout the nation. We do not know what they are but they are big.

What about this comment about the Ottawa elite?

[Translation]

What about the French language communities—like St. Boniface, St. Albert in Alberta and other francophone communities across Canada. Those are the elite, those are the people who are asking for services in French.

Does he realize we have unilingual senators and members of the House of Commons here, some unilingual French and others unilingual English, Canadian soldiers who speak only French or only English? Are these people not supposed to talk to each other? What does he really want? Does he want to scare Canadians? If there is any waste, let us identify it. Waste can be eliminated, but removing a policy that makes it possible to talk to each other is ridiculous.

Mr. Ringma: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, I have nothing against bilingualism and neither does the Reform Party, and when I say the elite, I am not referring to the people of Gravelbourg, Saskatchewan, or Grande-Prairie or St. Boniface. The elite are here in Ottawa, where they force the issue by saying: We will have this legislation enforced by inspectors who will monitor its implementation, and we can spend any amount of money on this. That is what I object to.

• (1820)

[English]

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur (Lambton—Middlesex): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to stand in the House to present my maiden speech.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you, Mr. Speaker, on your appointment to the chair.