

*Multiculturalism*

it means to be Canadian. Too often we Canadians take the many benefits of our citizenship for granted. We need to respect and protect our rights and freedoms on a daily basis, to keep them strong. Any challenges to these basic freedoms, at home and around the world, must be recognized. Promoting the need for this kind of vigilance will be a key aspect of the citizenship mission of the new department.

[Translation]

Therefore the Bill before us today is not aimed solely at establishing a federal department. It is more than a simple administrative measure designed to organize and combine compatible programs with a view to strengthening the natural link between multiculturalism and citizenship. Rather it is a means through which we will invest in the Canadian people and in the future of our country. This is why I am very proud to open the debate today.

[English]

In the course of many stages of debate on the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, my colleagues and I on this side made it clear that the Government opposed the establishment of a separate little stand-alone Department of Multiculturalism. Rather than isolating multiculturalism, the Bill before us today has a wider, more dynamic perspective. The Government has looked carefully at the commitments of the Multiculturalism Act. It has looked at the concerns of our different cultural and racial communities and it has looked at the concerns of ordinary Canadian citizens in all parts of the country. What resulted from that process is an agenda for change and for progress that will strengthen and enhance our common citizenship, our solidarity as a people and our vitality as a nation.

• (1610)

Just two weeks ago, following a discussion with House Leaders, my colleague, the Minister of Justice and Government House Leader (Mr. Lewis), announced that a new standing committee, a Standing Committee on Multiculturalism and Citizenship, would be established in the autumn. This new committee is part of our

agenda. We listened to those who have made proposals and we have taken their advice. This committee will play a key role in monitoring the application of the Multiculturalism Act and I look forward to working closely with its Members.

[Translation]

This Bill creates a very important department in terms of the way we Canadians look at ourselves and how we intend to prepare for the 21st century. Much as the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, this Bill concerns all Canadians and relates to the contribution and cultural wealth of a good many different legacies.

Allow me to recall that the Canadian Multiculturalism Act was unanimously endorsed last July because, as parliamentarians, citizens of this great country, parents and individuals we all want a Canadian society which is better for and fairer to ourselves and our children. In addition, since we want a society where we are all full-fledged citizens, the new department will be a determining factor in that respect.

[English]

At the core of the Department's mandate are two major purposes. The first is the promotion of Canadian pluralism, a pluralism which recognizes and values the full diversity of the people of Canada. The second is the promotion and encouragement of an active and informed citizenry, a citizenry that values the dignity, the freedoms and the responsibilities that we share.

We must encourage the kind of self-confident and compassionate Canadian citizen who recognizes the vast potential of our multicultural identity, the many benefits of our two official languages and the special characteristics of being Canadian. Citizenship means participating in the life of this country, respecting our fellow Canadians, playing an active role in the community and helping to safeguard our principles of justice and equality for all.

In the coming year the Department will grant citizenship to an estimated 94,000 individuals. They, too, will be part of our dynamic Canadian family and contribute to our nation-building.