

Standing Orders or not? I would appreciate the Chair's opinion. Perhaps the Chair could take this under advisement.

The Deputy Speaker: I think the case is closed, but since the hon. member put his case quite reasonably, I will give it some thought and get back to the House as soon as possible.

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QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

(Questions answered orally are indicated by an asterisk.)

Hon. Fernand Robichaud (Secretary of State (Parliamentary Affairs)): Mr. Speaker, I respectfully suggest that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the House agree that all questions be allowed to stand?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY—OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Deputy Speaker: I believe the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage has four minutes speaking time remaining.

[English]

Ms. Albina Guarnieri (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Canadian Heritage): Mr. Speaker, large numbers of parents have been enrolling their children in French immersion programs. Enrolment increased at a phenomenal rate over the past decade. Significant increases have also been seen in other French second language program schools outside Quebec and English second language programs in Quebec.

The most recent census shows that as a consequence of these programs the level of bilingualism in the 15 to 25-year group has risen from 16 per cent to 23 per cent in only 10 years.

• (1515)

The value of our official languages is also reflected in the desire of our English and French speaking minority communities to have access to quality public education in their language

Supply

as a key to retaining their vitality. The Government of Canada has assisted and continues to assist in the development of the minority official language education system across Canada.

[Translation]

Canadian identity is a reflection of who we are. It must therefore accommodate native people, linguistic duality as well as the multicultural nature of our society and our regional diversity. It is important for Canada to reflect all its citizens. The notion of "belonging" applies not only to those who had the good fortune to be born in this land, but also to those for whom Canada is a country of adoption.

Our concept of citizenship must also include the values we share and those we would like to be associated with. Equality and respect for diversity form an integral part of our shared vision of Canada and the vital elements of our identity.

[English]

The public debate has often been so focused on what divides us that it often overlooks the things we have in common, including our grassroots civic commitments to building our communities. This active concept of citizenship encompasses not only a legal status but rather our active commitment to the fundamental values we share which give us pride in our citizenship.

[Translation]

How do we go about edifying a common vision of Canadian identity? In my mind, this cannot be done in isolation. Existing tensions can only be overcome if all Canadians have an adequate knowledge and understanding of the fundamental realities of their country and aspirations of the communities that make it up.

It is not by accident that language and culture are recurrent themes in Canadian society. No parliamentarian or government can afford to overlook these issues. They must be addressed openly, transparently. There are certainly adjustments to be made to the application of the official languages policy and there is still room for improvement, as the Commissioner of Official Languages pointed out last week.

Public debate should focus on these improvements. It should deal with hard facts, and not myths, misconceptions and exaggerations. The hon. member's motion is based on such misconceptions and exaggerations.

I am pleased to have had this opportunity to take part in this debate and to show the importance of our official languages policy for Canadian identity. And I have no doubt that, put before the facts, this House will reject the proposal before us today.