

Oral Questions

the kind of a program that will meet the criteria, the principles that were developed.

He may very well be overstating the case when he suggests that there is an element of compulsion. Certainly there will be some incentives. I think that is what the hon. member would want because, in spite of some of the reservations he had about our approach in principle, his party and he himself supported the over-all principle of a long-term safety net which was largely developed by the producers themselves.

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OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT

Hon. Warren Allmand (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Acting Prime Minister.

Last week the minister for federal-provincial relations, in an interview with a major Canadian newspaper, said that Ottawa might give the provinces more control over official languages.

Considering the poor record of most provinces with respect to minority language rights and the critical and sensitive nature of this issue with respect to national unity, would the Acting Prime Minister say whether such a proposal is actually being considered and, if so, would he give the assurance that his government will not propose or entertain any measure that would weaken the language rights of official language minorities in this country: the francophones outside Quebec and the anglophones in Quebec? Would he give the House that assurance?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and Minister of Agriculture): Madam Speaker, there certainly has been no decision made on that particular issue.

The issue of the Official Languages Act and languages indeed has become part of the whole national unity debate. There are many commissions, inquiries and committees that are studying all aspects ancillary to national unity. Certainly the Official Languages Act has been one that has been discussed.

As the Prime Minister has said in the House and outside the House on many occasions, we hope to receive the recommendations and the data that is being collected, through the Spicer commission and indeed our own joint parliamentary commission, plus the many

examinations that are being undertaken by the provinces. We will deal with this information and hopefully come up with a package that will in effect reflect the attitudes and the views of Canadians.

This is an open and transparent process, and it would be in everyone's interest to ensure that the views of the public being collected right now will be looked at, studied, and honoured in some respects.

Hon. Warren Allmand (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce): Madam Speaker, these public musings or thinking are not really assuring the language minorities in this country, and the Acting Prime Minister has not given me the assurance I was asking for.

The minister for federal-provincial relations also said that the national consensus on official languages has eroded. Under the Official Languages Act, 1988, which was supported by all parties, Part 7 provides that the government should promote both official languages and enhance the vitality of the minority language communities in this country.

When will the government take steps to implement that part of the Official Languages Act and turn back the erosion referred to by the minister for federal-provincial relations? When will this government take strong measures to support official bilingualism?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and Minister of Agriculture): Madam Speaker, the government's record is very clear in that regard.

The hon. member and his party cannot have it both ways. They cannot, on the one hand, insist on an open and transparent process and then, on the other hand, reject and condemn any views and opinions that come thereto.

Really what we are doing at the present time is collecting the views and opinions across the country. The position of the federal government has been made very clear. We brought in amendments to the Official Languages Act that would conform to the constitutional requirements. That is the position of the government.

However, to deny people the freedom of expression of thought on any or all aspects devoted to national unity I think would not serve the best interest of democracy. I am sure the hon. member would be the first person in this House to condemn that.