

Post-secondary education

Preserve provincial jurisdiction but let us get our act together nationally and let us consolidate our efforts". This Bill is not perfect, not by any means. It should be amended. I had hoped that we could do that in committee. The Canadian Federation of Students is saying, "We believe that there should be students on this national advisory committee". I agree with that. But the students are saying that they think there should be two students out of the 16. It need not be a 16-member committee. We could create a 20-member committee, if that is what is wanted. There is some flexibility here. There is the possibility of amendment. Yes, there should be students on the committee.

The Canadian Association of University Teachers is saying that it feels that teachers should be represented on the national advisory committee. I agree with that. I think that such a provision should be made in the Bill for that.

The Association of Universities and Colleges and the community colleges will want to have representation on the national advisory committee, and so they should. Such amendments can be put forward. What I did was to draw up a Bill which recognized the two levels of Government and provincial jurisdiction. I drew up provisions for a 16-member council that preserved provincial jurisdiction since it would give the majority of members on the national advisory committee to the provinces. They have a majority, as they should, because education is their responsibility. But there are amendments that can be made, and should be made. I hope that if we ever get the Bill to committee they will be made. These things can be done.

I see that my time is coming to a close. I simply want to say again that I believe this is an extremely important idea. I believe it is something that must be done. It is an idea whose time has come. If we are going to call Canada a democracy and if we are going to be representatives within that democracy, we have to listen to the people, to the outstanding people who came together in Saskatoon recently. I give the Secretary of State (Mr. Crombie) credit for doing just that. It was an initiative that I say quite candidly was not taken by my Government. However, it was taken by the Government in power.

The Secretary of State did what no other Secretary of State was able to do. He was able to call together people of stature in Canada to discuss an issue of national importance. I give him full marks for that. I would give him even more marks if we could go further than that and if we could listen to the very clear voice that came out of Saskatoon from 500 or 600 eminent people who said that it is time in Canada now to have a national focus and a national strategy for post-secondary education. That was the message. That was the call. That was the challenge coming out of Saskatoon. Any politician in Canada today worth his salt would listen to that and would have to take some action on it.

Thus I call on the Government and on my colleagues in the House to recognize the importance of this issue. Let us send

this Bill to committee where we can examine it and where we can let people from all across the country say what is good and what is bad about it. Let them say what changes should be made and what kind of structure we should have. We cannot go from where we are now to where we want to be unless we have a vehicle.

There are those who say, "Let us go at these problems one by one". But which are the most important and which are the least important? Which will be put on the front-burner and which will be put on the back? I submit we can do none of those things unless we have a national vehicle. That is what we want to create here today.

I know that I have tested your patience, Madam Speaker, and I know that I have been long. Let me just conclude by saying this. We are resource-rich in Canada, but the greatest resource of all is our people, especially our young people. Are we to be one of the top five countries in the world with growing influence? Are we coming of age internationally and discovering what we are, who we are, and throwing off our sense of inferiority and competing head to head with world leaders? If we are, then it is time to make education a number one priority. We have to aim at a national strategy. I think that that is the greatest challenge facing Canada. If we fail to deal with it, it seems to me that we will be putting this nation at risk.

• (1710)

Mr. Stan Schellenberger (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Madam Speaker, the Hon. Member for Grand Falls—White Bay—Labrador (Mr. Rompkey) made a very convincing argument, and I commend him on an excellent address to the House on a most important subject. I am glad to have the opportunity to speak on the subject of the Hon. Member's Bill. I wish to commence by giving three reasons for my address.

I am sorry that, unlike the Hon. Member, I was unable to attend the conference in Saskatoon on post-secondary education. I know that some of our Members were able to attend that conference, and I believe that they will be speaking on this Bill. I do care deeply about the future of our universities and colleges. Therefore, I welcome the opportunity to bring to the attention of Canadians some important matters that were raised at that conference. I sympathize fully with the sentiments which are underlined by the Bill. Like most who are interested in post-secondary education, I believe that it has a crucial national dimension that we must find better ways to express here in the national House because we do contribute significantly to post-secondary education. As was stated by the Hon. Member, I understand that this view was echoed by those who were in attendance at the forum, including the Hon. Roland Penner who is Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Education for Canada. Consequently, I understand why the many organizations, as well as the Members of this House have called for some type of national council on post-secondary education.