

• (1640)

[*English*]

I also remember when I was first elected in 1968 that one of the first pieces of legislation we dealt with that year was the Official Languages Act. I remember that David Lewis, Tommy Douglas, Stanley Knowles, and yourself, Mr. Speaker, were all in the House. We had a good debate and it was with a great deal of pride that we passed the Official Languages Act back in 1968 to establish in law the equality of the two languages in this country in terms of the interaction of citizens with the Parliament of Canada and the institutions of this great Parliament of Canada, the institutions of the federal government.

What we are doing today is reaffirming, very importantly, our belief in the duality of this country that it must be protected, enhanced, and promoted.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, it is a fact of life in Canada. We are a country with two great languages. We have two founding peoples: the English and the French. In Canada's history, we read about an agreement between the two founding peoples on English and French.

At the time of Confederation, 125 years ago, it was agreed that the Civil Code would prevail in Quebec and Common Law in the rest of the country.

Mr. Speaker, besides two founding peoples, we also have a very important group, the pre-founding people: the aboriginal people of Canada. There were many Indian, many aboriginal groups in this country before the others arrived.

And subsequently, Mr. Speaker, a fourth dimension was added to our country. With a name like mine and a name like yours, Mr. Speaker, we and our fathers came from other countries. In my case, it was Sweden, and in yours it was the Ukraine, a long time ago. Another part of Canada's fourth dimension is our visible minorities. The result is that we have a country that is quite different from our neighbours to the south.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to say it in French. I know I speak with an English accent, because I learned French as an adult, but I would like to say something personal in French to our Francophone listeners. I remember that when I was elected—I was only 22—the House was

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considering the official languages bill. There had been a negative reaction in Western Canada from a large part of the population. I also remember Mr. Alex Kuziak, the first Canadian of Ukrainian descent to be appointed a minister here in Canada, and it was Tommy Douglas who appointed him when he was Premier of Saskatchewan. In the autumn of 1968, he told me that we had to pass the official languages bill for two important reasons. First of all, because it was a just cause. Here in Canada we had a french-speaking minority representing 30 per cent of our population, and it was a matter of justice for the French language and that part of the population that spoke French. But there is another reason, Mr. Speaker, and I remember it well, as a member of the fourth Canadian dimension. He said: Because of the French fact here in Canada, we have a tolerance for the other ethnic groups and for our natives. In this country, because we are tolerant with the French and the English, we are also much more tolerant than in the United States with the universities and with multiculturalism. It is also for this reason that he said we had to support this bill in 1968.

[*English*]

Those are great reasons that we should favour promoting and protecting the two official languages in this country.

This afternoon I want to speak about something else that is important, namely, the question of leadership. I think it is very important that this House take a very firm stand, and a very quick stand in support of duality in this country. Regardless of whether or not some people are in opposition to what we are saying, it is very important that we do what is right. It is very important that, as politicians, we do what must be done for the future of this country. It is very important that we not stick our heads in the sand, or try to forget that this issue exists, or not talk about it because it is not very popular in certain parts of the country.

My riding of Yorkton—Melville probably has fewer Francophones in it than any other riding in western Canada. I believe in the last census there were fewer than 100. But I have found throughout the years that if you speak openly, directly and honestly about the importance of linguistic rights in this country, the people of my riding and people across this country respect that and support me and support us for doing so.