

Adjournment Debate

● (1810)

[English]

The federal government's commitment to the Rouge River Valley Park remains firm. Upon establishment of a park management agency by the Ontario government, we would be pleased to consider funding further projects for park development within our commitment.

I would like to thank my friend from Scarborough—Rouge River for displaying his continuing interest in Rouge River Valley Park. It is a very important element in the lives of his constituents as well as all Canadians. He should be congratulated for bringing their concerns to the forefront of discussion in the House.

IMMIGRATION

Ms. Maria Minna (Beaches—Woodbine): Mr. Speaker, I am rising to discuss further the question I asked in the House the other day that dealt with the funding levels for settlement programs for immigrants.

As I mentioned during question period, 59 per cent of the 250,000 immigrants who settle in Canada settle in Ontario but only 39 per cent of the federal immigration settlement program funds go to language training for Ontario. As I mentioned, the budgets of the school boards in Ontario are being cut constantly by the provinces which is resulting in language training programs being cut.

I want to expand a little on why this issue is important and what it means to the future of all people in Ontario. We talk a great deal about the future of this country, stating that higher education is extremely important in order for the young people to be able to build careers, especially in the new knowledge based industries.

If the immigrant children who come to this country are not able to learn the language where they reside, whether it is English in Ontario or French in Quebec, they do not have the basis on which to build an education and a career, thereby being relegated to dead end jobs and being denied, in essence, a proper education.

The problem does not remain just with children. It is a wider issue and affects adults as well. When I came to this country in 1957 there was no such thing as a language program. Therefore we as children had to struggle.

The parents who worked long hours from five in the morning to eight at night either in factories or construction—certainly my parents—were not able to learn the language properly. We are now paying in a social way because if we do not pay up front, we pay later as a society.

Later we will pay for the seniors. We talk about seniors issues in this House. We must remember that there are hundreds of thousands of seniors in this country who came here and worked

for the last 35 or 40 years and are not yet cognizant enough of the English language to be able to take advantage of the programs we provide through our taxpayers' dollars. They are not able to take advantage of the counselling programs we provide. They are not able to take advantage of a lot of programs that are available to the average Canadian. This creates an added burden on society.

My question is very important because I am concerned and interested. I want to make sure we look at funding. I am not simply asking questions from the point of view that we want more money because there is money going elsewhere or what have you. It is not a light question. I am looking very seriously at the implications of what it means to people and the effect it has on these people's lives down the road, both the children and adults along with the seniors eventually.

It is a social issue and not just one of immigration. I want to make sure the minister understands that. I want to ask the minister if the discussions I understand the parliamentary secretary to have mentioned that day are in any way anticipated to bring about results in the near future or if we are looking at something that will take still some time.

My concern is that something happen as soon as possible simply because we cannot afford to have children in the school system who do not get a proper education. The school boards get their money as we know from ratepayer taxes. It is a finite source and it is very difficult to deal with added resources.

We as a government and as a nation have a responsibility to assist in this area because we are the ones that set the levels. We work with the provinces in identifying the immigrants we want to come to this country. We have a responsibility to then work with the provinces to make sure there is equity in the system.

I would appreciate it if the minister would address that aspect of my question.

● (1815)

Ms. Albina Guarnieri (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Canadian Heritage): Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member has a long and distinguished background in settlement work in her home province. She can take pride in the fact that the government has already introduced regulatory changes that will allow refugee claimants to work while awaiting the outcome of their claim.

The government is committed to enhanced co-operation and co-ordination between the two levels of government. We will have to work together to use scarce resources more effectively.

The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration met on Monday with his Ontario counterparts to discuss the very matter raised by the hon. member for Beaches—Woodbine. I am pleased to say that the province of Ontario and the federal government will begin negotiations with a view to establishing an immigrant