

Government Orders

• (1305)

[English]

The Department of Canadian Heritage is a proud partner in this process, administering a number of important programs to support aboriginal citizens in defining and participating in addressing the social, cultural, political and economic issues affecting their lives in Canadian society.

Aboriginal peoples launch and manage the programs which are community based and include such initiatives as the aboriginal friendship centre program, the northern native broadcast access program and the aboriginal women's program, aboriginal representative organization programs.

[Translation]

During the whole debate on this bill, Reform Party members have also expressed their opposition to the official and legislated recognition of both official languages in Canada. Canadians support the notion of two official languages for the very simple reason that these are the languages they speak and they are attached to them. For instance, in spite of the ever present threat of assimilation, minority francophone communities have gone from barely surviving to having their vested rights recognized. There is no way back.

On the contrary, the government recently embarked on a process which is the logical and unavoidable consequence of its vision of linguistic duality and of its action in this area. This process is aimed at involving all federal institutions in the development of minority official language communities, in accordance with section 42 of the Official Languages Act.

Obviously, the Department of Canadian Heritage is not the only institution able to play a critical role in the full development of official language communities. Interdepartmental consultation will help the machinery of government to promote the development of both official language communities, in every field of activity.

[English]

Canadians are open to the reality of the country with two official languages. The Reform Party opposition is a view that a majority of Canadians do not share. Sixty-four per cent of Canadians expressed support for the policy in an April 1994 Angus Reid survey. Provincially, support ranges from 88 per cent in Quebec to 73 per cent in the Atlantic region and a solid 59 per cent in Alberta. Over all, the last 10 years have witnessed stable and solid national support which continues both in principle and practice.

In addition, if one considers on the one hand the progress of official language communities in minority situations, thanks to their determination and the commitment of government, and on

the other hand the overall support of Canadians for the policy of official languages, it remains imperative to establish the Department of Canadian Heritage in law.

Under its official language promotion programs, the department encourages not only the development of official language communities throughout the country, but also the recognition and use of both official languages in Canadian society as a whole. The strengthening of our country's linguistic duality promises to improve opportunities for all. The Reform Party members would do well to recognize and accept this reality and join Canadians in the benefits accrued by it.

I commend the member for Calgary Southwest who went to St. Jean last summer to learn French. But the question remains how the member can oppose official language funding but does not mind using official language funding.

We all know that the 1993 reorganization of government was carried out with a view to streamlining the business of government and adapting the structure of government to improve the services it provides to the public. The aim of reorganization was to establish better, more efficient and more effective government. The Department of Canadian Heritage epitomizes that type of government.

I urge my colleagues to recognize the role the Department of Canadian Heritage plays in promoting Canadian values and support the efforts of the public service.

• (1310)

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): The hon. member has about seven to eight minutes.

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville—Milton, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak at third reading of Bill C-53, an act to establish the Department of Canadian Heritage.

As a member of the standing committee, I have had an opportunity to review the legislation and to hear firsthand accounts from witnesses. I believe this bill to be an accurate reflection of the mandate, activities and role of the department in fulfilling the mandate of the Government of Canada on several important fronts.

The department's programs have an effect on our day to day lives and their relevance, be it cultural or economic, is felt by each of us. Within this department are the programs that speak to us regarding what it means to be Canadians, that set us apart from the rest of the world and that have helped Canada earn its top ranking by the United Nations for overall quality of life.

The new Department of Canadian Heritage embodies the democratic principles that are inherently Canadian. We are a nation forged on fundamental respect, respect for basic human rights and values, respect for the use and equal treatment of two major official languages, French and English, respect for cultur-