

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, March 27, 1974

The House met at 2 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

BILINGUALISM

EDUCATION—ANNOUNCEMENT OF RENEWAL OF FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL PROGRAM

Hon. James Hugh Faulkner (Secretary of State): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that arrangements have been completed with provincial ministers of education for renewal of the federal-provincial program on bilingualism in education. Under this program, the federal government will provide funds to assist the provinces with the supplementary costs of providing minority language education and second language instruction for a five-year period, starting April 1, 1974.

You may recall a letter dated January 13 to members of parliament in which I mentioned how impressed and encouraged I was following a series of meetings last fall with ministers of education during which I discussed renewal of this program. In that letter I also mentioned the renewed determination of French-speaking minorities outside Quebec to preserve their language and culture and of a related desire on the part of many English-speaking Canadians to establish bonds of co-operation and understanding between the two language communities of this country.

[Translation]

Since 1970, the federal government has financially assisted the provinces to maintain and improve the educational facilities available in the minority official language, and to improve the teaching of the second official language in the educational systems of Canada.

The objectives of the program, as agreed to by the federal and provincial governments, are twofold; to ensure that, insofar as it is feasible, Canadians of either official language have the opportunity to educate their children in their own language, and that Canadian students have the opportunity to learn, as a second language, the other official language of Canada.

[English]

It was gratifying to note that the Commissioner of Official Languages shares my optimism over our progress toward these objectives. In his report tabled on March 21, the commissioner speaks of some important trends, including a desire among English-speaking parents to extend and improve the teaching of French.

The commissioner has also spoken of the commendable leadership demonstrated by the federal government and

sees it as playing the role of an increasingly effective catalyst in the field of language programs. The commissioner stated his conviction that the contributions made by the Department of the Secretary of State constitute a program deserving renewal and expansion.

As under the existing program, the bulk of federal financial support after April 1, 1974, will take the form of payments made to the provinces based on the number of students enrolled in second language programs and the time spent on these activities. In addition, a federal contribution of 1.5 per cent of the annual per student cost will be paid to the provincial governments for administrative purposes and will be based on the total number of school children in each province belonging to the minority language group.

The importance of supporting innovative and experimental measures in minority language education and second language instruction continues to be recognized by the federal and provincial governments and the new agreement makes provision for continuing shared-cost projects designed to meet such needs at any level of the educational system.

I expect federal funding to continue at much the same annual level as at present for most elements of the program. Cost of the over-all program during the past four years has averaged some \$70 million annually.

As I mentioned in my letter to members of parliament in January, I feel that the real answer to recognizing the bilingual reality of Canada is through the school system. If bilingualism is to work, the base must be established within our schools.

I am extremely gratified by the level of co-operation I have encountered in discussions with the provinces about the renewal of this program and I look forward to continuing collaboration for the forthcoming five-year period.

● (1410)

Mr. Heward Grafftey (Brome-Missisquoi): Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House welcome most assuredly the minister's announcement. This is a program which in our view merits the support of each and every member of parliament in this House of Commons.

It has always been my view that our educational system as such has a primary role to play in emphasizing the positive benefits of bilingualism, and this the minister certainly emphasized in his announcement.

We on this side of the House have displayed concern and are still concerned that moneys voted by Ottawa to the provinces for second language instruction are not in fact used in all cases for this purpose. Nothing the minister has said in the past or today has assured us that this situation has been entirely rectified. Of course, if second languages are to be properly taught, we need more good teachers and