

*Private Members' Business*

It would seem more sensible to pull the whole lot of linguistic items together, specify the purpose for each, tote up the terrifying sum, add 10 per cent for integrated cost, then publish and defend the thing as the high but necessary price for being Canadian.

Those words were written 20 years ago but have been ignored ever since. I am not here to make any wild claims about the cost of official languages because the truth is that I do not know the cost. The truth is that no one knows the cost.

Why do we not know the cost? It is because the accounting practices used for these programs have taken more twists and turns than contestants in a Chubby Checker dance-a-thon.

Mr. Spicer knew this in 1975 and the government knows it today but refuses to act. On two separate occasions I put motions before the Standing Joint Committee on Official Languages but was turned down both times. That is why I am getting rid of some of my frustration in proposing the motion originally put forward by Jean-Robert Gauthier.

The people in this committee say that we have the numbers from the commissioner and there is no need for verification. However the truth is that the numbers are not verified in any meaningful way. The commissioner gets the numbers from the Treasury Board which he accepts at face value. Treasury Board produces these numbers based on cost reports produced by all departments and agencies.

The guidelines for producing the reports clearly state that certain costs are not to be counted, such as the person years and salaries of employees taking language training as well as those of staff hired to replace the employees on language training. They do not count those costs.

Treasury Board says that its books are open to the auditor general, but if the books do not contain all the information it is difficult to conduct a thorough audit. It must also be stated that the auditor general has never turned his attention to the full range of language policies and programs.

We know that in 1991 the auditor general looked at the Translation Bureau, found many problems and concluded:

It became clear the Translation Bureau would have to undergo major changes to correct the weaknesses we identified.

In 1993 a follow up audit was conducted and the following conclusion was reached:

Despite these efforts, however, we note that significant weaknesses still exist. We are particularly concerned about cost reduction.

This is but one small area of the official languages program. After 26 years has not the time come to fully probe the entire menagerie created by the Official Languages Act?

The only question that remains is: Who should carry out such an important review? I have already stated that the official languages committee has no desire to perform such a task. Nor would it be the appropriate body as it is out of step with the demographic and linguistic realities of Canada. It would also be impractical to impose this duty on any parliamentary committee as they are dominated by the Liberal government which I believe is committed to the status quo.

My motion simply calls for the appointment of someone to conduct a thorough and balanced review of the work done so far. This someone should be the auditor general. The office of the auditor general is highly respected by all Canadians. It is at arm's length from Parliament and therefore free from political interference. The auditor general is already on the payroll, meaning there will be no extra cost to the taxpayer to conduct this vital review.

● (1340)

[Translation]

As indicated in the Reform Party's blue sheet, we support the concept of official bilingualism. However, we do not approve the way the act has been implemented during the past 26 years. That act was never subjected to a complete review. This is totally unacceptable to those who care about the linguistic policy's integrity.

It should also be mentioned that the B and B commission correctly pointed out that each province is the ultimate authority on its own territory. Consequently, any future linguistic reform should be conducted through the provincial authorities. The Reform Party shares these views but, unfortunately, the principle is not found in the act as such.

[English]

Over the past nearly 20 minutes I have illustrated the shortcomings in the act as seen by official languages commissioners, bureaucrats, academics and average Canadians. I have stated logically why we must revisit the act and who should carry out the review: the auditor general.

The issue of language has proven to be the subject of very emotional and sometimes illogical debate in the House. We have seen it directly within the year. It is regrettable as the issue is far too important to be reduced to such a level of squabbling and name calling. Therefore I call on all members of the House to be cognizant of the sensitivity of the issue as they enter into debate today and in the coming months.

I bring the motion forward in the hope of furthering open and honest discussions on Canada's language policy. Partisanship and ideology will do nothing to enhance a true exchange of ideas.