

Private Members' Business

To bring this Chamber into the 20th century you may want to address this question today: what is more important, jacket and tie or message and debate? Would you consider therefore, Mr. Speaker, referring this matter to the Standing Committee on Elections, Privileges and Procedure while at the same time providing us with your ruling for our guidance until the committee has reported?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member has raised a matter which has been raised in this chamber a number of times before. The hon. member is an experienced member and he puts the point with a certain eloquence.

I am of course concerned that the complaint that is brought in front of us is that, because of his dress, the hon. member was not able to enter into a debate which was at that moment about to collapse. It may well be that hon. members will want to change our present practices but I must be cognizant of what they are. In view of the circumstances, I will reserve my ruling and report back to the House and to the hon. member as soon as it is appropriate. I thank the hon. member.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 30(6), the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business, as listed on today's Order Paper.

**PRIVATE MEMBERS'
BUSINESS — MOTIONS**

[*English*]

FEDERAL PENITENTIARIES

LITERACY PROGRAMS

Mr. John Brewin (Victoria) moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should consider the advisability of expanding literacy programs in federal penitentiaries.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to ask the House to endorse the motion I placed on the Order Paper calling on the government to consider the advisability of expanding literacy programs in federal penitentiaries.

This of course is International Literacy Year and I am rising to ask the House to address itself to a particular aspect of the problem of illiteracy in Canada, the quality of our programs in Canada's federal prisons.

We in Parliament have a special responsibility for the level of programming in Canadian prisons. We have no excuses in this House if the job is not properly done. We cannot blame the provinces, school boards, colleges, universities, municipal governments or the general community. We have only ourselves to hold responsible for the fact that our programs are not adequate.

It is important at the outset of Literacy Year that we in this House call on the Correctional Service of Canada, the Solicitor General and the government to address this and that we in this House focus our attention on this particularly sensitive and difficult problem.

Let me say at the outset that I acknowledge the Correctional Service of Canada is working at the problem. It has had in place for some time a literacy initiative program. The issue is whether the program is satisfactory and sufficient to deal with the problem. I hope that members of the government will rise today and tell us in detail and in specific terms that that is exactly what is happening. The information I have indicates that the programs are lacking, and this is expressed in statistics and in human suffering. A survey in 1989 demonstrated that 65 per cent of our prison population is functionally illiterate. This means that 65 per cent of the people in our prisons cannot read simple instructions on a cough syrup bottle, cannot fill out simple forms, cannot understand sections of the Charter of Rights, or pick out correct numbers from a list or page of numbers. In the general population, there are in the area of 22 per cent to 24 per cent who are functionally illiterate. That in itself is a scandal in this country, but 65 per cent of our prison population is currently illiterate and we must do something about it.

The federal government program presently in place is called the Adult Basic Education Program. This program is, to the extent that it is in place, attempting to come to grips with the problem. I want to pay particular tribute to the previous Solicitor General, Mr. Kelleher, who actually convened a national conference in 1987 on offender literacy. Unfortunately, the current administration appears not to be following up on the concern and initiative shown by the previous Solicitor General. I may add that even that Solicitor General neglected to invite