

that solution. The federal government must provide core funding to help all the groups develop a nation-wide network to transmit the skills, the methods and the techniques to those who must learn to teach at the local level.

Honourable senators, the government must communicate, motivate, encourage and support financially a national war against illiteracy. It must work with the provinces, but the federal government must take the lead. To begin with, it could launch an awareness campaign very quickly by inserting graphic pamphlets on illiteracy and learning disabilities in every cheque the government issues—not just the pension or Family Allowance cheques but with every cheque. It can be done, it should be done, and those groups who have expertise in this area are eager to assist in any way they can.

Next, the government could develop a national advertising campaign on illiteracy and learning disabilities on television, radio, in newspapers and magazines, and on highway billboards. Terrific work has been done in terms of public education on the dangers of smoking, on mental health, on drinking and driving, and even now we are witnessing the beginning of a televised campaign against AIDS. Honourable senators, illiteracy touches probably more than 20 per cent of our population—a staggering figure—and it cries out for similar exposure. This public awareness must be accompanied by core funding, and I am not talking about multi-billions of dollars but, in part, re-directing and prioritizing money that is already available in the system and adding to it.

It is interesting to note that out of the multi-billion-dollar budget for education and re-training each year in Canada, the amount committed to combatting illiteracy is 0.001 per cent. In other words, virtually nothing. For a start, we are talking about only \$12 million to \$15 million to enable community literacy programs to function and create new initiatives. Without this funding support community groups will not be able to deliver the assistance to illiterate Canadians who may be encouraged to seek help because of the public awareness programs.

For some time now, Frontier College has been working with governments across the country. However, that college is now in the process of dismantling nationally and internationally recognized programs because of lack of funds. It needs \$1 million to expand its training capacity to work with the private and public sectors and the volunteer agencies in this country.

The Department of Manpower and Immigration used to direct about \$1 million to illiteracy core funds—a very small amount. However, that contribution lapsed and is now only partially restored. It must be renewed and increased and, in the process, the government could dramatically emphasize its own commitment by facilitating programs to assist its own employees who have literacy problems.

I might add, honourable senators, we would do well to ensure that similar opportunities were also available within the Senate working environment, and I will let you think about that one!

The government must take a serious leadership role with the provinces to build a network of help for the learning disabled, separate from other literacy programs. No longer should the children in Newfoundland with learning disabilities go through life illiterate because there is no opportunity for the kind of identification, assessment and teaching which exists in downtown Toronto or Calgary.

Senator Hicks: And it exists in Corner Brook, Newfoundland, too.

Senator Fairbairn: It does, indeed, senator.

While the assessment process is expanded across the country, teachers must be trained not just to detect children who may be learning-disabled but also to respond to their need for special learning techniques. No province or federal government can turn away from this disability which affects 20 per cent of all Canadians.

All of these suggestions are feasible and possible. They will not drain the federal treasury. What is needed is the will to get going. I submit that must begin with the political will of the federal government. It should have happened a long time ago. Illiteracy is a national issue so severe that we must not permit it to continue to fall between constitutional jurisdictions, or continue to be compounded by our own ignorance and neglect. We have the financial capacity; we have the human resources; and we have the materials and the skills to launch a national campaign and to make it succeed. I suspect for everyone in this chamber the ability to read and write has opened the way for our involvement in public life. I cannot imagine my existence without that ability. We are failing in our duty, honourable senators, if we let one fifth of Canada's human resources remain without access to that same opportunity.

Parliament Hill is the place where the nation-wide battle against illiteracy must begin, and I ask all of you to join in that battle, in your regions, in your provinces, in your cities and towns. This chamber was created in part to protect those who exist outside the power of the majority. I suggest now is the time to fulfil that mandate for the silent minority of illiterate Canadians.

Hon. Ann Elizabeth Bell: Honourable senators, I would like to congratulate Senator Fairbairn on her excellent speech and ask her to tell us the name of the book that she is recommending from which we can glean some helpful information on this subject.

● (1610)

Senator Fairbairn: I could list a number of books that have been written on this subject. The one I have with me today is entitled "The Right to Read—Tutor's Handbook". That was published by Frontier College. That is the handbook they use to teach students in high schools how to teach their peers.