

*Canadian Heritage Languages Institute Act*

out to the educational and cultural communities of Canada, to the business communities of Canada, and to all levels of government to forge a strong national network, a network bringing together linguistic resources of Canada and the experts in the field. It would in fact fulfil a tremendous need for the co-ordination and exchange of information on Canada's heritage languages.

I would like to take just a moment to emphasize to the House the extent to which our heritage languages enrich the Canadian way of life. There are over 70 languages spoken in this country, not including specific dialects. Some belong to the aboriginal peoples of Canada and were part of our heritage long before the arrival of Europeans. Other languages have been brought to this nation by those who came here from all parts of the world seeking a land of freedom, security and opportunity.

From my own perspective, heritage languages are a vital component of daily life in Canada. I have spent considerable time travelling across the country and meeting people from many different cultural and racial groups, groups which remain fiercely proud of their first languages. One does not have to venture far in any of our major metropolitan centres to encounter the variety and the vitality of Canada's spoken languages. They are all around us. They are a living culture which lifts the everyday life of this country beyond the ordinary.

Just last Saturday, I had the opportunity to speak at the annual meeting of the Canadian German Congress in Winnipeg about the establishment of a chair for German-Canadian studies at the University of Winnipeg. This further verifies the multicultural nature of Canada and the need to preserve and give understanding to other Canadians of that heritage.

This richness and diversity of languages is something to be proud of. It is something to be cherished. It gives us a sense of where we have come from, a sense of our roots, and of how many unique individual heritages contribute to our national character.

Language is the strong current of a culture. Language provides the means for passing on the heart and soul of a culture, its folklore, stories of the past, and, yes, dreams of the future. Languages bond people together, giving them a strong sense of community and of common values, but languages are more than just a social phenomenon. Languages are an important natural resource for Canadian people.

Language is an economic resource. It is a resource which boosts our trading profile. It is a resource to use in international diplomacy. It is a resource for tourism. Certainly our reputation for hospitality and friendliness is much enhanced as we welcome visitors in the languages of the world. Within Canada today, there is an increasing demand for people—teachers, translators, negotiators—with heritage language skills. This is why we made such strong commitments in the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, commitments that we are backing up today with Bill C-152.

Let me take a moment to outline to the House the special features of this legislation. The Bill describes the establishment of a new and special kind of institute, an institute which from the outset is designed to be a co-operative venture. We want the institute to be a facilitator, to be a means for community groups, institutions, corporations, and all levels of government to work together to develop the rich linguistic versatility of our society. To that end, we have established measures for an endowment fund, a fund which will allow the institute to function independently and to set its own priorities.

The institute will be incorporated federally as a charitable organization so that it can seek a broad base of public and private support. We also expect it to encourage support from other levels of government. I think all Hon. Members would see this as being a co-operative era of partnership in multiculturalism. This is our idea of working in co-operation with all segments of Canadian society and further developing a major national resource, our heritage languages.

The institute's mandate is ambitious. It will undertake a variety of activities that will foster the teaching and learning of heritage languages across Canada and their ongoing use in our society. This mandate includes improving public understanding and appreciation of heritage languages, upgrading the quality of instruction and learning materials, developing Canadian oriented materials, and conducting research into all aspects of Canada's heritage languages. Of course, one major purpose of the institute is to provide a national focus, a focus which will bring together expertise from across the country to respond to the different priorities identified at the community level.

I will not take the time of the House now to go into specifics about the powers of the institute or the way it will be set up. There might be questions about that later. Each of us here has an opportunity to read and to consider the Bill, but I wish to make the point that it is important for all of us to consider, in a positive sense, our heritage languages.

We have attempted to provide the Canadian Heritage Languages Institute with the maximum degree of flexibility, the flexibility to ensure that it can meet its objectives and achieve excellence in its work. We have given the institute a structure and a set of objectives to accomplish this important task. Let me repeat just how important this task is.

Right now, the multiculturalism sector of the Department of the Secretary of State supports some 1,600 supplementary schools at which over 130,000 students have a chance to learn the languages of their ancestors. These are impressive figures and enrolments are continuing to rise. My point is that we are not dealing with a marginal social and cultural activity. We are in fact responding to the many Canadians who feel deeply concerned about preserving their heritage languages and using them in today's modern society. We have made a commitment to help these Canadians do exactly that.

Our commitment to this institute is part of the strong new directions for multiculturalism that were announced last May by the Minister. That commitment is being reinforced with