

intellectual dishonesty. They know that and they are trying to put forward that position without owning up to it.

To suggest as was suggested before that the budget attributed to official languages would keep hospitals open is the height of irresponsibility. I said irresponsibility. There are other words that could have been used.

As I indicated before it is the old tribalism back at work. We have our tribe. You can have your tribe. Within each of those tribes, and we have seen that, there are some members who are more valued than others.

We are having a debate about official languages. What will be the next target? Multiculturalism? Aboriginal self-government? Obviously there are people out there who are concerned. I share those concerns and I am quite prepared to talk about them but let us be honest about it.

I do not deny, I have never denied, and I have written professionally about this topic, that the Official Languages Act costs money. I have said it. I have outlined the costs and I will continue to say it. But you have to look at it in perspective. You have to stop pretending that for the deficit and the debt and the hospitals there is a miracle cure. I am tired of hearing that kind of nonsense and I think a lot of others are tired of hearing that kind of nonsense as well.

If the Reform Party of Canada is truly interested in official languages why would it not look at what we have and try to build upon it as opposed to destroying it? It is among the first who would blame the Bloc for wanting to separate and destroy a country. I have asked the Bloc: Why not stay with us and help us build a better country? I say to the Reform Party rather than destroy the official languages, rather than perpetuate the myths that are out there which are frightening people, why not join in a debate that is intellectually honest?

● (1730)

Why would you not say that if the federal government does not continue to be involved that those small communities will disappear? Those small communities are fragile. Have you ever lived in one of those small communities? Do you know how difficult it is for someone to retain that language? Do you know how long they fought to do it? Do you know what price they had to pay? I doubt it because if you did—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member knows very well he is to put his remarks to the Chair. The reason we do not want members saying “you” is to avoid emotions getting too high. Will the member please do that.

Mr. Duhamel: Mr. Speaker, I suggest that if the hon. members who brought forward this motion had lived in minority language situations as many people have had to do, if they had

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had that experience they would not have brought forward this motion.

I ask them, through you Mr. Speaker, to put away their prejudices and look at how we can improve it. Of course it can be improved. There is not a program in government that cannot be improved. Of course money can be saved. There is not one program in government that cannot be improved in terms of more efficient use of funds.

That should be the focus of the debate. The debate should consider what kind of Canada do we want. What kind of investments are we willing to make in our minority language communities? How are we going to make sure we make the investments that are sufficient not only to sustain them but to permit them to grow?

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I have one final comment. Like my colleague who preceded me, I would have liked to have a little more time. I would simply ask my hon. colleagues to try and be constructive, rather than destructive.

[English]

Mr. Bob Ringma (Nanaimo—Cowichan): Mr. Speaker, first I will address the comment of whether any of us had lived in minority situations. I was a kid in Vancouver and I was one of those foreigners and heard: “His parents are foreigners. What is a name like Ringma anyway? That is funny sort of foreign name to me”. I have lived it probably more than others in this House.

I heard the last speaker talk about intellectual dishonesty. I want to say I heard some intellectual dishonesty coming out from there saying why would we not build on the official languages policy rather than destroy it. It is precisely what we are trying to do. We are saying to amend the Official Languages Act, not chuck it out. We are saying to amend it and build on what is good in it.

I heard talk about intellectual dishonesty. If we are talking about bilingualism now, what will be next? Multiculturalism? Native rights? Do we not have a right, an obligation in this House to talk about these matters without emotions coming to the fore and people saying: “You cannot talk about that”. This is nonsense. That is what Parliament is for. I will stand on my rights to talk about all of these subjects. It is my duty, how much it may hurt.

Finally, demonstrable local public demand is the phrase that was picked out of the motion. I agree it is a difficult one. It equates to what is in the act today, where numbers warrant. That is an area we should go at together. We should specify whether it is 5,000 or 10 per cent or 2 per cent of the population and under what circumstances. Let us put it out. Let us not just deny it.