

Adjournment Debate

It is estimated that about 22,000 people have left the north in the past 15 years. Most of them are retirees and young people. The time is therefore right to found a new academic institution which would put great emphasis on the quality of written and spoken French. The illiteracy rate among francophones is thought to be 40 per cent. This situation is urgent, even though a sustained effort should be made at the primary and secondary levels starting now.

Nevertheless, in a national perspective that would ideally seek to create a climate of acceptance for linguistic minorities, such an initiative should be supported. Section 23 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees Francophones outside Quebec the right to education in French at the primary and secondary levels, where numbers warrant. In my humble opinion, these rights could be extended to the post-secondary level and it could be left to the Supreme Court of Canada to decide if such an extension were challenged.

From a practical point of view, students and parents would save tremendously on transportation costs; depending on where the college was located, the costs of room and board would be substantially less for those who would stay with their parents. Establishing such an institution in the north would also provide very significant economic benefits.

In conclusion, I would like to take the opportunity to remind the government that the province of Ontario announced on the weekend that it was approving the creation of two colleges, one in the north and the other in the south. This is subject to a contribution from the federal government, which I think is urgent.

Might the government be waiting for the right moment to make it an election promise? I hope not, because one should not play games like that with people's futures.

[English]

Mr. John A. MacDougall (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): Mr. Speaker, since at least 1989 it has been a priority of this govern-

ment to do whatever it can to help the government of Ontario meet the legitimate demand of franco-Ontarian communities for the creation of a viable network of French language community colleges.

Of course in becoming involved in a project such as this we always have to keep in mind that education is in the area of provincial jurisdiction.

Nevertheless it is our conviction that the federal government has a duty to co-operate with the provinces to help ensure the highest possible standards of services to our official language minority communities throughout Canada, when the provinces indicate to us that they want our help and co-operation in this field.

In the case of Ontario, we are dealing here with a project of three separate colleges, one in northern Ontario, one in southern Ontario and one in the eastern part of the province.

The third project, *La Cité collégiale* has already been completed and is now receiving students right here in Ottawa—Carleton. It has proved a resounding success with an enrolment of almost 50 per cent of the number originally forecast.

It is in fact the tangible result of the agreement signed in 1990 between the Government of Ontario and the Government of Canada. That accord covered a seven-year period and an involvement of federal contributions of \$50 million. To date, the government has paid out \$19.5 million to the province as its share of expenses.

Negotiations with Ontario are proceeding for the creation of two other colleges and have been going on for the past several months. During that time the Secretary of State has had regular meetings with the provincial Minister of Colleges and Universities, the hon. Richard Allen.

There are of course problems to solve in terms of cost, definition of perceived location and institutions involved but discussions have been going on well and real progress is being made. We are confident that the agreement can be reached very soon.