

Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act

I should like to tell my colleague, the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier, that what we are going through tonight is part of a package, of an ongoing endeavour.

With reference to these people's mentality, if they hear that someone rich in the country has a problem, the Government will introduce a legislation to help him—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): Order, please! I must regretfully advise the House that the question and comment period is now over. Debate. The Hon. Member for Regina West (Mr. Benjamin) has the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina West): Mr. Speaker, I have pleasure in rising tonight to support the Progressive Conservative Party and to help the Conservatives and the Government in every way I can so that they can implement the promise of the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney), and the Conservative Party, to return to the 1977 funding formula for post-secondary education and health care.

It is not often I rise to support a Government, Liberal or Conservative, in something it said it would do. I admit that it is not very often I have done that. But tonight I want to applaud the Government for its platform plank. I just hope that its plank does not get plunked. I want to assure Conservative Members in the most non-partisan manner I can muster that if they were to implement the promise they made of returning to the 1977 funding formula, they would be applauded by every person in this country from all political Parties including, I must confess, myself.

Mr. Nickerson: I doubt it.

Mr. Benjamin: In that event, if I could get the floor, I would be the first to rise in the House and applaud. I am trying to be helpful to the Conservatives. I know it is a rare occasion but there is also nothing wrong once in a while for a Government or political Party to say: "Holy mackerel, maybe we underestimated this or goofed on that. Let's go back to the drawing board, back into the Parliament or the legislature and decide to do it in a different way". It is not too late. The Government can call another Bill as soon as I sit down and debate it for the remainder of the evening. It can call a different Bill for tomorrow and come back next week with a revised formula in conjunction with the announcements of the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) today, his amendments to his Budget, and you can be sure, Mr. Speaker, that the House would quickly approve any other amendments which would help the Government and the Conservative Party implement their promise to return to the 1977 funding formula. I do not know how much more helpful I can be than that.

Mr. Lewis: Sit down.

Mr. Benjamin: My hon. friend opposite suggests that if I sit down that would be helpful. In terms of my speech it might be helpful, but it sure would not be helpful in terms of giving him and his colleagues time to consider a change in the eleventh

hour. In fact, I think they would probably receive more credit for that than for anything else they have done in many months, at least since their change of heart, and I call it that sincerely, with respect to the indexation of senior citizens' pensions.

● (1940)

I had only a few moments to browse over the material which arrived on my desk today from the Department of Finance, in particular the amendments tabled by the Finance Minister. He can obtain any extra money the Government thinks it would need to live up to its promise of returning to the 1977 funding formula, and he can certainly bring in amendments if further ones are needed. With respect to his minimum tax proposal, for example, if we were to add 1 per cent to that—perhaps even one-half of 1 per cent—he would have the money he needs to return to the 1977 funding formula.

I also have another little suggestion. It could be posed as a minor amendment on which I am sure the Minister of Finance would receive unanimous consent in a matter of a minute. What I propose is a small, modest interest rate to be charged on corporation taxes which have been deferred. Let us say an interest rate of only 3 per cent, which is the rate we used to charge during the Second World War. I point out that 3 per cent of more than \$30 billion in deferred corporation taxes would bring in \$900 million in revenue. Surely that would be more than enough to keep the fifty-fifty funding formula in place for secondary education and health care. It would also provide enough money to provinces when they choose to improve or enlarge the services they presently provide which are eligible for federal cost sharing. The money would be there for that. In fact, it would serve as an enticement to the provinces to improve even further their delivery of secondary education and health care services.

The other thing it would do is to allow the provinces to get into new services that would also be eligible under the criteria. I worry that, in my efforts to assist the Government in meeting its promise to return to the 1977 funding formula, new services that would ordinarily be eligible under the criteria of the federal-provincial agreement for health care would lose out.

The two items I have proposed would also provide enough funds, for example, to allow for new services that are not necessarily new but that would have been placed under new regimes. I refer to ambulance services, whether they be air or ground ambulances, and whether they be for injuries, sickness or for moving the elderly. A few weeks ago a senior citizen telephoned me with respect to moving her 85-year-old husband by ambulance a total of about seven miles from their apartment to a hospital for emergency blood transfusions. The bill was \$65.

I wish to repeat what I said at second reading stage of this Bill. I wish to direct this comment to my colleague, the Hon. Member for Bow River (Mr. Taylor), whom I respect as a fine Christian gentleman. Those who would make a profit off the misfortunes of others are basically immoral. I submit that the provision of a service such as an ambulance service should be