

member for Mercier also said that the time has come for Quebecers to take complete control of their own destiny.

• (1615)

However, I find it hard to keep a straight face when I hear these arguments, because in their draft bill, they want their dollar to be the Canadian dollar, they want their passport to be a Canadian passport. And throughout the debate on these issues, they want to determine the scope and subject of the referendum question. They had a debate, and they told us the question would include one on political and economic association with Canada. It seems to me they want what Canada has to offer. In that case, I challenge them to do the following. Instead of wasting the 10 or 11 million dollars it cost to conduct these consultations—the hon. member for Mercier also mentioned the high poverty rate—I think this money would have been better spent on dealing with unemployment and poverty.

So we have four bills that were mentioned together in an attempt to demonstrate that federalism, as they see it, has become centralist.

I would like to discuss Bill C-76, which implements certain provisions of the budget tabled by the Minister of Finance. In referring to this bill, the opposition is very critical and says we want to centralize everything. In fact, the only condition set by the government for the Canada social transfer is the period of residence, which cannot disqualify a recipient from receiving social assistance.

The other criterion, which already exists, is maintaining the five principles of health care. At the request of the Province of Quebec and the other provinces, the government decided to group these transfers. Again, at the request of the provinces, the government gave them a set target budget, guaranteed for a period of two years. And the members of the Bloc Québécois complain that we want to centralize powers!

I find it very hard to understand how the motion could possibly be about centralization, since in this bill and other bills, and also in our approach as a government, we have shown repeatedly that we want to decentralize powers, in two respects. The first one is to eliminate overlap and duplication. Not because it is the will of the Province of Quebec or of the Bloc. No. Because it is the will of all of Canada, all Canadians, because it will save us money. That is what we are doing.

My presentation is about Bill C-91, the bill in relation to which the National Assembly just passed a motion, as the hon. member for Mercier just said. As I will explain, I find it hard to believe how the Bloc Québécois can construe this bill as an effort on the part of the federal government to once again centralize powers.

Canada and Quebec have entered a new phase of economic growth. The federal administration is sensitive to the globaliza-

### *Supply*

tion of markets and to the increased emphasis on competitiveness. We are redefining the federal government's approach to the economy.

• (1620)

The most important part of this new approach is recognizing the dynamic role that small and medium size businesses play in job creation and the creation of wealth.

This government has developed many approaches and reworked its strategy and its tools to take into consideration the key role that they play in our economic prosperity.

[*English*]

Bill C-91 gives the Federal Business Development Bank a new mandate. Under this new mandate the bank will be able to increase its activity in smaller loans and investments and focus more on knowledge based industries and exporters, two of the thriving forces in the global economy.

A key element of the bank's new mandate is partnership. Bill C-91 makes it easier for the bank to work in close partnership with other partners. These new closer partnerships will help small and medium size businesses and will avoid inefficient and costly overlap and duplication, contrary to what the members of the Bloc Québécois have said.

[*Translation*]

The opposition's reaction to Bill C-91 disappoints me. The opposition claims that the objectives of this bill are to usurp provincial powers, to build a centralized state and to take considerable powers away from Quebec.

This opinion could only be based on a misinterpretation of clause 20 of this bill.

[*English*]

Clause 20 says: "The bank may enter into agreements with and act as agents for any department or agency of the Government of Canada or a province or any other body or person for the provision of services or programs to, on behalf of, or jointly with that body or person". I do not know how the opposition member can misread that. It is quite clear. This is not in any way an intrusion by the federal government into provincial jurisdiction. Clause 20 of Bill C-91 facilitates co-operative joint ventures with partners from the private sector as well as the public sector.

Clause 20 permits the bank to enter into agreements with other persons and organizations, including federal and provincial government departments and agencies. The authorization applies to the bank, not to the other parties involved. Let me repeat that again so members of the opposition understand. Clause 20 applies to the bank only. I think this is where they are having a hard time. It does not apply to the other parties at all. The other parties, whether they be government agencies or