

Government Orders

It is not perfect but let us remember that it is an attempt to redistribute wealth so that we can have from our provincial governments and from other levels of government services that compare favourably with one another and that we do not have one part of the country so terribly disadvantaged that the basic essentials of life such as health, education and other services do not exist or have for all intents and purposes disappeared.

We want to remind each other that there are three provinces which give. That is often forgotten. The provinces of Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario redistribute some of their wealth to the seven other provinces. It is unfortunately something that is forgotten and probably something that is resented by certain citizens of those provinces on occasion. I would say generally speaking it is reasonably well accepted that those with more, even though it has been difficult, will share some of that extra.

It must be remembered as well that this is an unconditional transfer payment. In other words we do not really put conditions that it must be spent on such and such a program.

• (1310)

However it must be spent in such a way that the essential programs or those basic programs to citizens are maintained so that they enjoy as much as possible a quality of life as similar as possible to that of others in other jurisdictions.

I have heard today the ceiling and the floor criticized. Surely if we are going to be responsible we need to have a ceiling and a floor. We cannot simply pay out without any restrictions. We cannot simply let the bottom fall out without any restrictions.

I was really surprised that no one got up and applauded the government or said thanks for having come to its senses unlike the previous government. Five years of this particular program has been given so we can plan. We know what the ceiling is. We know what the floor is. Now we can make decisions much more easily on those programs that are under our jurisdiction, our responsibility. Perhaps that will happen before the debate is over. I am hoping it does.

Finally, we need to remind ourselves that if we did not have the program there would be a lot less equity, a lot less fairness. Some provinces would have a lot less than others. This gives us a sort of efficiency capacity, in other words being like one another in terms of providing basic essential services, of roughly 93 per cent as opposed to roughly 85 per cent if we did not have this.

It makes up a significant contribution to equalization of services to bring additional equity into the country in the services we offer our citizenry.

Let me make two final comments before I invite remarks. I want to read to Canadians and my colleagues here the kinds of moneys being transferred through this particular program during fiscal 1993–1994.

[Translation]

For example, we transferred \$910 million to the Northwest Territories, \$164 million to Prince Edward Island, \$880 million to Nova Scotia, \$895 million to New Brunswick, \$3.739 billion to Quebec, \$854 million to Manitoba and \$522 million to Saskatchewan, for a total of nearly \$8 billion in 1993–94.

[English]

This is a lot of dollars being redistributed for the benefit of citizens who happen to live in those particular provinces and in those two territories.

I believe this is the kind of program that makes Canada unique. It is the kind of program that takes, even in very difficult times such as the ones we are experiencing right now, from those who have more—the provinces of Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario—and redistributes to those other seven provinces and the territories that have considerably less, relatively speaking.

I applaud the government for the five-year program, for the limitations that it has put in place, because it is good for long-term planning. It is wise management. I would hope we would put aside our political differences which need to exist for a moment at least to see how the program can serve Canadians and perhaps be improved.

[Translation]

I think that is what we should aim for today, tomorrow and beyond.

Mrs. Madeleine Dalphond-Guiral (Laval-Centre): Mr. Speaker, I was impressed by how the hon. member for St. Boniface paid close attention when my colleague from the Bloc Québécois made his speech.

I myself listened very carefully to his own speech, which the hon. member was kind enough to make in the two official languages, since he is fluent in both, and I thank him for doing that.

However, I would like to point out to him some nuances. For example, when the hon. member compares standards related to Canada's signing of an economic treaty such as NAFTA, it must be stressed that those are international standards. It seems to me that, in French, national and international standards are two different things.

• (1315)

NAFTA standards apply specifically to agreements on the economy, the environment and labour relations, among others things. I must admit here that I am not an expert on this treaty.