

The Budget

Mr. Soetens: Madam Speaker, it is certainly a very good question and I appreciate the member asking it.

He is right, we did have a chance to get to learn a little more about each other certainly in our week at Saint-Jean, Quebec. I do not know if I failed the course, but I certainly would not profess to be bilingual at this point in time. I appreciate, though, that we did have an opportunity to try to learn together on what I think we both found a very difficult subject.

• (1610)

But on the issue of Petro-Canada, I would like to comment that certainly in my constituency, and I presume the same applies particularly in western Canada, there is an awful lot of people who simply will not shop at Petro-Canada because it is owned by the taxpayers.

There is a group of constituents in this country who believe that Petro-Canada should be owned by the private sector. People want to shop at Canadian businesses. There is no doubt about that. And if Petro-Canada were owned by the private sector, first, it would have the freedom to make some investments, to borrow some money, and make some long term commitments without the constraint of the federal government in its pocket. Right now PetroCan cannot borrow money without our approval because, of course, we are the owners of it.

When we do not have any money ourselves, it is awfully difficult for us to argue that somebody else ought to be allowed to borrow it. So I think that the freedom that Petro-Canada needs to operate as a private corporation in the private sector will enable it to be even more positive and more aggressive in fulfilling the mandate that it has. I have a lot of constituents who would be happy for that to happen.

Yes, being on the finance committee is tough. But I can tell you that constituents throughout my constituency and certainly throughout most of Canada want the government to address the deficit. They want to address the way we spend our money and I think that that is where leadership comes in. You just have to make those tough decisions. We are making them, and, yes, I am sorry we are down in the polls, but I know we are making the right decisions.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): The period for questions and comments has now expired.

Before recognizing the next member in debate, I would like to tell the House that I have received written notice from the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan that he is unable to move his motion during the hour of Private Members' Business on Friday, February 23, 1990.

[*Translation*]

Since it was not possible to exchange positions on the order of precedence, pursuant to Standing Order 94, I instruct the clerk to move this item to the bottom of the order of precedence.

The time provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business will therefore be cancelled and, pursuant to Standing Order 94, the House will continue with the business before it at that time.

[*English*]

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Saskatoon—Clark's Crossing.

Mr. Chris Axworthy (Saskatoon—Clark's Crossing): Madam Speaker, it is with mixed feelings that I rise to discuss the budget introduced so recently. It attacks all those things that the members of the New Democratic Party in this House hold dear. It attacks the sick, the students of the future, and it attacks the very poor in our society. Fully 70 per cent of the cuts in this budget attack the sick, the students and the poor, which is an indictment that I do not think any party, any government or any finance minister would want to spread around too freely.

It is not a surprise at all that only 19 per cent of people in this country support this government's position. This government was reminded by 88 per cent of Canadians not to cut post-secondary education and health care, and yet it went ahead and did it anyway.

This budget indicates that the government has run out of ideas and has no idea on how to manage the economy. The Tories have preached restraint now for six years and have yet to target the greatest single contribution to the size of the deficit—our insanely high interest rates.

With peace breaking out all over Europe, this government has not touched defence spending. In fact, defence spending will increase by 5 per cent, at the same time