

Government Orders

Mr. Blackburn (Jonquière): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I abstained from voting, but I wish to say that I think that the environment, which is a split jurisdiction with federal primacy, must remain so, as was recommended in our report. However, at this stage of the constitutional negotiations, I consider this bill to be an irritant and inappropriate at this time.

Mr. Gérin: Mr. Speaker, I believe that a member who is opposed to a bill must vote against it and not abstain.

[English]

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member may believe it but it is not a rule.

[Translation]

Mr. Della Noce: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I rise in this House to ask you where is Lucien, the father of this bill?

* * *

[English]

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL FISCAL ARRANGEMENTS AND FEDERAL POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION AND HEALTH CONTRIBUTIONS ACT

MEASURE TO AMEND

The House resumed consideration of the motion of Mr. Mazankowski that Bill C-60, an act to amend the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements and Federal Post-Secondary Education and Health Contributions Act, be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Finance.

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre): Mr. Speaker, I must say I am somewhat disappointed to be standing in this House once again to speak against the latest govern-

ment budget, in particular when it comes to the transfer payments to the provinces.

The reason I say that is, as you know Mr. Speaker, if we are to follow the trend and look at the graphs as they relate to transfer payments for both post-secondary and health, by the year 2004 there will be no money going from the federal government to the provinces in the areas of post-secondary education and medicare.

• (1540)

Mr. Speaker, as you probably know, the issues of medicare and education have been identified by the Canadian people as the two most important issues and the issues that are closest to their hearts. The reason is because one of those issues, the question of education, deals with the future of Canadians and the other issue deals with their very existence, the issue of health and health care.

On the subject of education *per se*, Canada has spent perhaps more than any other country in the world. As a matter of fact, we spend approximately \$50 billion on education. That includes all levels of government, federal, provincial and municipal.

When we look at the return on that investment, unfortunately we find it simply is not there. At no time has one level of government taken full control over the issue of education and rightly so because the question of education has always been a joint venture, a partnership between all the different levels of government. They have come together on this issue. The federal government deals with the transfer payments for education. It spends money on education through transfer payments and the provinces match those funds. From time to time they spend more and sometimes they spend less. The municipalities deal with questions of education at the primary and secondary level.

When one of those partners who is fully responsible knows full well that our education system is not meeting the needs, when one of those partners backs off, it really comes as a disappointment to the other partners. Like any other partnership, when one of the partners is not fulfilling his or her commitment, the partnership starts falling apart. That is exactly what is happening here in the area of education. More and more the federal government is backing away from its responsibility in the field of education.

There are two segments to it. First, historically when the federal government was investing money in the area of education in terms of transfer payments, it was giving that money to the provinces which in some cases were