

The Budget

• (1215)

This government is cutting R and D and the granting councils 14 per cent, the same way it is cutting small craft harbours across the country at a time when R and D is important for the country. This is a government of one of the only modern countries in the world to have closed universities. That is what happens when there are no priorities. That will be the first weakness of this government.

I have already alluded the second, this false objective of 3 per cent of GDP which frankly is not good enough and will not last. The country needs a very firm commitment to balance the budget with a timeframe.

The third weakness in the budget is in its approach. The budget and its unilateral ways go against the very essence of what federalism is about. Rather than setting national objectives for deficit and debt reduction, rather than sitting down with the provinces to avoid a situation, we are only off-loading debt into their yards.

How do we know a provincial government will not choose to increase taxes as a consequence of the budget? Where does that leave the taxpayer, the men and women, individuals who pay taxes today? There may be more than one level of government but there is still only one taxpayer. The approach is wrong and will not work.

The fourth area is the hidden agenda. Pension reform is the most glaring one. Here is a government that says it wants to undertake pension reform but will not share with the House of Commons the studies it has done in this regard when we know the impact and the consequences of what it is proposing are tremendous.

Let me give another example of the hidden agenda of this government with regard to the budget. The Prime Minister went on a TV show with Mike Duffy, stating as a matter of policy the government wants to reduce the cost of health care 1 per cent of GDP.

Mr. Duffy had a guest on his show last week, Dr. Jane Fulton, Ph.D., a professor of health policy and ethics at the University of Ottawa. I do not remember anything being said in the budget about cutting health care in Canada 1 per cent relative to GDP. This is not an ordinary member of Parliament who said this. It was the Prime Minister.

What does this mean? According to Dr. Jane Fulton: "I think if we have to talk between \$7 billion and \$10 billion, and every time we cut \$1 billion out of any kind of public funding we cut about 10,000 jobs". I am not quarrelling that there need to be serious thinking and reduction of funding in health like in every other area of government.

What I find objectionable is that the government in this case has a hidden agenda. It is not coming clean with Canadians. Why did the Prime Minister not say this? Why did the Minister of

Finance hide this from the House when he came forward with his budget? I am assuming the Prime Minister did not think this up. Did it just appear in his mind during an interview that this would happen? If that is the case, we all need to be enlightened with regard to this.

There is one advantage to the budget in terms of what it means to all the issues we are confronted with. It certainly puts into perspective the real accomplishments and the failures of previous governments. If this government likes to blame the previous government on anything that went wrong, it would also want to acknowledge the strong growth we have in our economy today was also because the previous government restructured our economy, brought forward the FTA, the NAFTA, the GST, privatized, deregulated.

These were the main features and the Liberals fought every one of them for nine years. Those enabled Canadians today to have economic prosperity and see some real job creation as we now go on to deal with some of the really tough issues we are confronted with.

This government has no compass, no plan. The last nine years were a complete farce. Whatever it was saying or purporting to present as positions were all thrown out the window. The red book has been thrown out the window.

• (1220)

I see my colleague here, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Foreign affairs took a deep hit in the budget, contrary to anything the Liberals purported as being a position for ODA in the years they were in opposition. It does not resemble it at all.

Canadians will now watch very closely as this government tries to get its act together and await whether there will be a sense of priority and planning in terms of where this country is going.

[Translation]

Mr. Ghislain Lebel (Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member for Sherbrooke on his fine speech. I would say he is quite loquacious.

I note that he is attributing the current rise in the interest rate to the budget tabled by the Liberals, whereas, about a month ago, he attributed it to the political uncertainty in Quebec. I am happy that the member for Sherbrooke is making amends and recognizing the real source of our difficulties.

I find him wordy; I like him; I think he made a fine speech, and I would like to ask him this. Why did he not give the same speech during the electoral campaign in Brome—Missisquoi just before February 13? He never opened his mouth there. He said nothing of all that, and yet he knew it to be true. He did not say a word. Are we to understand—and this is my question—that there was an agreement with the Liberals not to hurt them during the electoral campaign in Brome—Missisquoi?