

Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act

Bill. The Bill has gone through first reading, second reading and we are now in third reading in this House. The Bill was also discussed in committee. On second reading the Bill had 10 days of debate. Ninety speeches were given in those 10 days of debate on second reading. We are now on third reading and this is the third day of debate. The Hon. Member who just spoke was the thirty-second speaker during those three days.

Ms. Copps: And we have more.

Mr. Redway: On this Bill so far we have had 13 days of debate in the House and 122 speakers. The Hon. Member for Renfrew—Nipissing (Mr. Hopkins) has spoken twice in the debate today. First, could he point out to me one submission, one comment, one iota of information he gave in his second speech that was different in any way from the first speech he made in the House today on the same topic on the same Bill?

Second, the Hon. Member talked about credibility, fairness and changes in funding to the provinces. Could he tell me whether he believes that it is more fair for the Government of Canada to increase transfer payments for health and post-secondary education to the provinces, as we are talking about in this Bill, by 7 per cent, annually when the inflation rate was 12 per cent annually, as was done by the former Liberal Government of which he was a member and supporter, or is it more fair to increase both payments by 5 per cent when inflation is running at only 4 per cent as is being done through this legislation? Those are the two questions I have for the Hon. Member. First, can he point to one single piece of information in his second speech that he did not give us in his first? Second, is it not more fair that we should be increasing payments to the provinces at a greater rate than inflation rather than a lesser rate the way his Government did?

Mr. Hopkins: Mr. Speaker, I thought when the Hon. Member rose that he was going to ask me a very difficult question. I want to thank him for the almost free ride. He asked me what I said different tonight to what I said earlier today. I mentioned a number of things tonight. I predicted that with this new federal-provincial financial system in operation it would only be a matter of time before we would be appointing another very high profile commission, in Canada such as the Rowell-Sirois Commission which was appointed in 1937 after five years of Government by R. B. Bennett.

I mentioned many good pieces of legislation and the reforms that came out of that commission. I suppose it was a matter of some concern to the Hon. Member on the Government side that I brought the Prime Minister's credibility into the debate again tonight. I make no apologies for that. I will continue to bring the Prime Minister's credibility and lack of it into every speech I make as long as I am in this House. I will do that because he made a promise to all my constituents on which he turned a complete flip-flop. The Minister of Finance made a complete flip-flop on the statements he made in this House, as demonstrated by the Bill we are considering today.

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We all fully realize that you cannot apply a general rate of inflation to medicare and post-secondary education. Both medicare and post-secondary education costs in the country normally increase more quickly than the regular rate of inflation. I do not think the Hon. Member is looking at this very realistically. Over the next six years the Government will take \$8 billion away from the provinces of Canada.

The Member obviously supports that action. His constituents will be complaining to him that they are paying higher property taxes because their municipalities cannot afford to pay the bills any more because the provincial Government has to put more of its money into post-secondary education and medicare. There is not a government supporter in the House who should complain one bit when any provincial Government increases taxes after supporting this legislation. They are in fact forcing the provinces to increase their tax bases. The Member's question underlines what every government Member is thinking about, that is the bottom line, which is what obviously counts to them rather than the humanitarian aspects.

Ms. Copps: Mr. Speaker, I appreciated some of the very personal comments that the Member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke (Mr. Hopkins) made with respect to the broken promises of the Government in his area. I would like him to elaborate in one specific area. I have a number of relatives in the great and good town of Eganville in the Ottawa Valley. I know that the Valley is presently facing some very unique problems with respect to the need for health care services and, in particular, the need for chronic care services. Some of the smaller communities of Ontario have aging populations relative to other parts of the province. Could the Member tell us what effect he thinks the cut-backs in health care will have, particularly in the more isolated communities like Eganville which have a very large elderly population?

Mr. Hopkins: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Hon. Member for her question. She obviously understands rural Canada a little better than some of the authors of this legislation. Hospitals such as those located in Barrys Bay, Deep River, Mattawa, Renfrew and the two in Pembroke are fortunate to have a Liberal Government in Ontario that is looking after them extremely well. The Minister of Education is our provincial member and he understands the situation very well. Recently he was able to open new facilities at one of those hospitals.

The new Government in Ontario has introduced, for the first time, a helicopter ambulance service which will be very useful in rural areas such as that. People in my area are saying how different it is with the new Government in Ontario, the popularity of which is sky-high and which is doing a fine job even though it is a minority Government. The Government in Ottawa has the biggest majority in Canadian history and cannot seem to get its act together to do anything right. Its credibility is slipping away more and more as it deals in legislation such as that before us today.