

The Budget

There are enough studies now to show that we can save significant amounts of money that we can put into important aspects like prevention and helping to improve the health status of the population so our children can grow out of poverty and be healthy. We know that poverty is a major determinant of ill health in the country. We need to shift our resources where they do the best and where they improve the condition. That is what we can do if we manage the system better.

I do not see that any kind of cutbacks in funding will make our health care system worse. It is a challenge for provinces to learn how to manage the system appropriately on sound principles and guidelines. I think we can do that and I think the provinces are equal to the challenge.

With regard to young Canadians who are looking for work and any Canadian who is looking for work, the unemployment insurance system at the moment has shown us that 25 per cent of Canadians across the country are functionally illiterate. Forty per cent in the maritimes are functionally illiterate. We are not looking at the traditional student any more. We are looking at adult populations, non-traditional students, who need skills and tools to get back to work.

On one hand, the government is trying to push the engines that will drive the small and medium size business sector which will create 80 per cent of our new jobs. On the other hand, we are looking at unemployment insurance as an adjustment that will help people to get the tools and the skills they need to get back into the workforce so they can become independent contributing citizens who contribute to the competitiveness of the country. That is what we are looking to do, create opportunity; a springboard and not a safety net.

• (1715)

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay East, Ref.): Madam Speaker, when I listen to many of the Liberal members I am reminded of Eliza Doolittle. She was getting very frustrated and she finally sang a song which I believe was "Words, words, words. I am so sick of words".

I listened to the member talk about the proposal where the government is proposing to combine the money it is transferring to the provinces for health and welfare and for post-secondary education into this Canada social transfer act, then magically make \$4.5 billion disappear.

Members should know Reform made a proposal like that. However, when we talked about it, we were talking about transferring tax points, transferring the ability of the provinces to be able to fund these. This is simply downloading.

The difficulty with this plan is that the Canada Health Act and the Canada assistance plan are both etched in stone as far as the provinces are concerned. Therefore the entity under the Canada social transfer that literally goes begging with this \$4.5 billion

is post-secondary education. Post-secondary education simply disappears.

I have a very specific question for the member. Considering that members' pensions are such a monumental issue in the province of British Columbia, I know that her constituents, certainly all the people in British Columbia, would be interested to know if she intends to exercise her option of opting out of the members' pension plan, thereby showing the leadership that the people of Canada are looking for.

Ms. Fry: Madam Speaker, although the member made a nice little speech prior to his question that I would like to comment on, I will respond to his question first.

The hon. member is asking me if I will opt out of the pension plan because he sees it as a way of being responsible. There are many ways of being responsible. I would like to look at the whole issue. I would like to see whether it is feasible to opt out or whether I choose to do so.

Reform of pensions is a fundamental and basic issue. It has been looked at. The Prime Minister was very clear when he talked about reforming members' pensions. We have had a report from a third party that talked about a lot of reforms to pensions and to MPs incomes that I do not see the hon. member discussing in total.

It is easy to cherry pick, to take one little part of a report and comment on it. You have to look at the whole. That has been a fundamental flaw in all of the third party's policies. Its members take a little piece of a narrow strip and never look at the big picture. They never see how it impacts, whether there is a domino effect or not.

The hon. member should look at the big picture sometimes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Madam Speaker, as the official opposition critic on human resources development, since the last election campaign, I am today faced with the Martin budget. It has been one long obstacle course.

Having come this far and despite what the minister says, I know from reading his budget and listening to his speeches that, far from giving up the idea of implementing major cuts in social programs and centralizing powers, the budget before us confirms that what the central government wants most of all is to withdraw from health, education, social assistance and other social services, but to keep the sectors where it feels it must be involved, even if they are not under its jurisdiction.

• (1720)

Now, without a word of warning, without any concern for efficiency, it is about to shamelessly increase duplication and overlap. During the human resources development committee's