

Government Orders

must be pointed out, however, that this situation is not the parents' fault but results for the most part from economic hard times and the current climate of government indifference.

Being poor means being hungry, being cold, being unable to concentrate in class, being sick more often than others; it often means having lost hope, living with violence, addictions and despair.

Some say that the government is on the brink of bankruptcy. Everyone agrees that it is imperative to reduce the deficit. However, the government has a moral obligation to ensure that the measures advocated will have no negative effects on the disadvantaged. These measures should primarily be designed to improve socioeconomic conditions for those in need. To launch a real effort to put its fiscal house in order, the government must concentrate on its operating costs and on defence spending.

It is only during an election campaign that we dare to propose miracle solutions to balance budgets with such large deficits. No one in this House is fooled, let alone the citizens of Quebec. The government must resist the temptation to cut social programs and service delivery.

• (1735)

The minister of human resources tries to reassure us by saying that under the system, basic security will be extended to all those in need. However, the services that are available right now to help those wishing to escape difficult circumstances and improve their lot in life are already inadequate. The government must devise a strategy to beef up social programs and services while bearing in mind the financial ability of the provinces, and of course Quebec, to pay and scrupulously upholding the principle of program accessibility and universality.

Substantial cuts in recent years in federal transfer payments for health care have considerably increased the tax burden of the provinces and of Quebec. Public concern over possible cuts in federal social housing subsidies has left us fearful that this government is no longer seeking the path to reform, but has already found it.

The official opposition will never agree to allowing this government to get a handle on the deficit by strangling society's less fortunate members. Curbing the deficit by cutting social security is unacceptable in a society that for many decades has defined itself as just and fair, a good place to live.

Quebec has long been demanding, and with good reason, an end to overlap, duplication and federal government encroachment on provincial areas of jurisdiction, especially health care and education.

Quebecers and Canadians have long been calling for a healthier, more streamlined government machine. Eliminating the additional expenditures resulting from program overlap would

be another step forward in the process of putting our public finances in order.

The consultation process launched this week is important. The stakes are high and this government cannot afford to misdiagnose the problem and, especially, to prescribe the wrong medicine.

I am proud to be a member of the nursing profession and recently, the Association des infirmiers et des infirmières compared the cost of health care in Canada with costs in the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, Japan and Sweden. It would appear that health care costs are higher here than anywhere else. But, is our health care system any better for it? Would our services suffer if we were to identify the reason for these cost disparities?

Nurses are in favour of maintaining the quality of health care in this country. By listening to their expertise, perhaps we can come up with ways of using all of our health care system's resources more intelligently.

Like all modern societies, Quebec want to control its growth and confront the future in a dynamic, responsible manner. The outcome of this debate must not impede the attainment of this objective.

• (1740)

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Peterborough on questions or comments.

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough): Mr. Speaker, I regret to say that I was standing here because my colleague had placed his brief case in my seat. If there is something of interest that you would like me to say, could you give me a topic and I could begin.

The Deputy Speaker: We will not see that member for a long time in the future.

Is the member for London—Middlesex standing because he wants to do some other thing or ask questions?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Pat O'Brien (London—Middlesex): Mr. Speaker, I really did mean to stand. I appreciate you giving me the floor.

We have now heard the last two speakers from the Bloc praising and extolling profusely the health care system of Canada. How great it is to hear that praise.

Then I have to remind myself that this is the party whose whole raison d'être seems to be to break up this country. I have a problem reconciling that effusive praise for our social services system with what is their political goal.

That leads me to my question. There seems to be a prejudging of the consultation process that the minister of human resources seems intent on starting throughout this country which is a very necessary consultative process. Could the member explain to us