

Adjournment Debate

In September I asked: How can you cut funding to education, close employment centres on campus and continue to talk about competitiveness, productivity and the fostering of a climate conducive to a learning culture? When you look at the facts, here is what you see.

[*English*]

If you look at the cumulative decisions that the government has made from 1986 to 1995, you will find there are 9 billion to 10 billion fewer dollars—not million, billion—for education, that there is less for training and retraining, in spite of the fact that we have gone through a Canada-U.S. trade agreement that has demanded all kinds of adjustments, in spite of the fact there are almost 4.5 million people who are unemployed as we speak tonight, 2 million people are on social welfare, and 1.8 million people who will be fed by food banks this year.

What has happened to training and retraining? They promised to double the investment. We used to be at 1.40 gross domestic productivity, half of what our major competitors are. Now we are down to 1.20 and we have cut science and technology and the government has imposed a 3 per cent tax on student aid.

I cannot believe the insensitivity of it. They have cut student centres on campus at a period when student employment was around 20 per cent. Student debt has risen and gone right out of sight. We are talking about people with debts of \$25,000 to \$50,000 increasingly frequently.

I was talking to a student just last week who was very close to being \$50,000 in debt. Why? What has been the impact?

Tuition fees have sky-rocketed in the last decade. It is a 120 per cent increase, most of which has happened since 1986. We do not talk a lot about incidental fees. Another important component to students is these little fees that they have to pay for various services, and what have you at university.

Accommodation costs for food and lodging are right out of sight and those are a large proportion of a student's budget. What has happened? It is because of these cuts and reductions, and the increases that the government has off-loaded on to the provinces to the universities and to the students.

What offends me most is that it boasts of controlling expenditures.

[*Translation*]

It is as if I passed all my debts on to my wife, my children and my neighbour and then said: "Look, I reduced my debt". Is that good? No, it is not, it borders on dishonesty.

I am going to submit to you another point.

[*English*]

The government talks about how much it spent. Look at what it does. It looks at the cash transfers. When it talks about how much it invests in education, it looks at cash transfers and tax point transfers.

There is the double standard. I would simply like to complete my remarks by saying that I hope my colleague is going to speak from the bottom of his heart to answer honestly my question which is: How can you cut funding and still talk at length about the things you want to achieve in education? There is an obvious contradiction there.

Mr. Vincent Della Noce (Parliamentary Secretary to Secretary of State and to Minister of Multiculturalism and Citizenship): Mr. Speaker, I understand how my hon. colleague feels. I want to talk to him from the heart. Indeed I have already discussed this with him and I talked to him from the heart.

Unfortunately we will not be able to make great declarations in just two minutes. But the part that comes from the heart has to do with the fact that I also have a child that is presently attending the University of Montreal. I can assure you that since loans were not repaid in the past, because of the negligence of the banks—the government guarantees these loans so the banks do not make any efforts in that sense—we are lucky that there are still loans for students today.

I would like to remind my hon. colleague that the 3 per cent cost may represent some \$80 over \$2,700 for 200,000 students. This may be the assurance that this Canadian program for the students will continue to provide efficiently the small amount that these 200,000 students benefit from each year.

I will now give a few statistics to my hon. colleague. This program guarantees financial institutions that the loans they grant to post-secondary students will be repaid to them, and I add this which is not in my notes but which comes from the heart: the banks do not have to make any effort since the government guarantees those loans.