

The Budget

• (1735)

This budget sets this country on a sure course of fiscal responsibility and government renewal. Our task is not over and our efforts will not cease. Those who believe that the government will inevitably let up in its effort to cut costs as the next election approaches simply do not understand the conviction of the Canadian people that a deteriorating national balance sheet is no longer acceptable.

[Translation]

Constant renewal is what this country is all about. Indeed, it is the essential ingredient of a dynamic federalism.

There are those who would argue that this country, this federation, cannot change—that Canada is about the status quo. That is nonsense.

None of us is here to defend the status quo. We are here to change it. And with this budget we are.

Providing new fiscal leadership. Reducing overlap and duplication. Giving the provinces greater freedom to design and deliver services. These changes respond to positive pressures for change from across the country.

They mark a recognition on the part of us all that in this tough, competitive world, despite the differences we have, we all have so much to gain by working together—productively, rather than standing apart—destructively.

This budget faces difficult choices for all Canadians. But this year, in Quebec, some of us are also being asked to choose a country. To choose to remain proud partners in a large, reforming country. Or to become something else—smaller and alone. To embrace real change and improvement, or to join those who pretend that the road to a better future lies through fracture.

The separatist view has always been the same—its own status quo. Ignoring reform that has happened. Denying reform when it is occurring. Refusing reform when it is offered.

That is not our position. By definition, Canadian federalism is change—always improving, always progressing and today, with this budget, reaching ahead to a new phase of renewal.

[English]

It is customary at this time, when closing the presentation of a government's budget, to claim that the measures being taken have solved every problem, responded to every expectation and addressed every need. That is something we will not say today.

The fact is there is so much more that we would like to be able to do for the millions of Canadians who care little about the

world of dividends and derivatives and simply worry about making ends meet. That being said, if we believed that dealing with the deficit would do nothing to protect what we value, if we believed that it would do nothing to offer hope to ordinary Canadians, we would not be acting now because it is they who suffer when government must focus its precious resources on satisfying lenders abroad rather than real needs at home.

• (1740)

For all of us who care for the social fabric of this country, who seek a better future for our children, who are committed to the protection of our seniors and to the independence of our country, the state of the nation's finances simply has to be addressed.

[Translation]

The choice is ours. We can either dwell on our imperfections—or work together towards real improvement.

We can leave the field to those who have given up on Canada—or we can demonstrate trust in ourselves.

[English]

We believe this is the year we can turn the corner and turn the page. It may seem like a long struggle, but the light at the end of this tunnel is much nearer than any of us might think.

Canadians can have confidence now in a government that has put the era of band-aid budgets behind it.

Canadians can have confidence now that their social programs will be there for those who need them.

Canadians can have confidence now in their country being one of the most attractive places in the world to invest, creating jobs.

For too long, governments have known the need for reform and renewal; known the need, but not the will. That has been the problem with the governments of this country. This government has made its choice and it is against the status quo and in favour of a stronger country.

Let me close by quoting from another Canadian in an earlier time, a member of a previous government who, as I remember, did not particularly like finance ministers:

Government must not live in the past—Every day there are new needs to be met. If inflation is to be fought, unemployment countered and something done, and soon, to get Canadian prosperity back into its stride, the government must begin to plan ahead—not timidly, not tentatively—but boldly, imaginatively and courageously.

Mr. Speaker, those words were spoken by my father in 1957—for his time. That is what I believe we have done today, for ours.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.