

know that we have established the parameters in which the Canadian economy can thrive. In my view, government cannot make the economy thrive. It tries, but the main thing it has to do is get out of the way. The way to get out of the way is by running its affairs properly and keeping the taxes as low as possible while protecting those members of society who need the social network. Never forget that. That is one of the most important functions of government. Though we talk about dollars and cents here, we are all exceedingly conscious of that fact and we are continually trying to adjust and make as effective as possible the social network and the support that government gives to those who cannot help themselves and need help. That is one reason I agree with the changes to the Child Welfare Act.

One of the main principles of running a budget is that there is never enough money to go around. That is something which no person concerned with the public finances should forget.

The second principle to remember is that what the government spends the people cannot spend. In other words, people cannot use their discretion to spend money if the government has taken it from them. So we have those two factors of public finance to consider. By no means deduce from that that the least government is the best. I do not think that at all. That is another argument entirely.

In spite of these principles that I am attempting to establish, a third principle is that in our country the government has the responsibility to take care of those who need help. That we must be prepared to pay for, and that we must be prepared to support.

The conclusion of all this is that in managing the public affairs the principle of priorities is the one which must ever be in the front of our minds. There is never enough money. There are always more people making claims, particularly the special interest groups. So the establishment of a system of priorities is essential to having any kind of order in the public finances.

There is lots of room for debate on what those priorities ought to be.

● (1140)

I respect opinions that differ from my own, but if you accept the principle of priorities, you are getting pretty near to virtue. So, the question of priorities comes up in connection with the child welfare plan.

In universal programs, and I know this is not popular, but I have maintained it all my life, there is never enough money to go around. If everyone gets something, if the rich get it and the poor get it, the rich get something they do not need and the poor do not get what they do need. The only way to solve that question is to make sure that you target your support to those people who need it, defining that term as broadly as you can. It means that those who are rich are not entitled to this kind of support, and those that are poor will need it, and they need more than they are getting now.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

Senator Roblin: What the present policy does, and you may find faults with it, is that the rich who do not need it will not

get it, and the poor that do need it will get a little more. Maybe it is not the right poor; maybe it is not enough, but the principle is sound and one that I support.

You must be careful how that principle is applied given all the various kinds of social networks that we have in this country. I am willing to admit that there is room for argument, that it does not apply "universally", if I can use that adjective; but, in this case, I think it does apply universally. Therefore, this is a policy that ought to be supported.

Honourable senators, under our new rules, in the 15 minutes allotted to people like me who want to speak on the budget, I will return to my theme. The budget is not perfect. The management of the government is not perfect. It is a human device, no matter how you look at it, and there are ways in which it can be improved. I for one will listen with interest to people who can make suggestions about improvements, who can suggest a better system of priorities, provided they accept the principle. I am willing to listen to that, because wisdom does not reside on this side of the House alone. We are willing to hear what other people have to say.

The main trust of this budget, and that is all we can deal with today, is helpful. Taxes are coming down a little bit; the deficit is being restrained a little bit. Public services are under close control, and the monetary issues, of which my friend spoke, are encouraging. We now have low inflation, which we never dreamed of three or four years ago. If you get interest rates coming down, as they are now, and if we see the dollar gradually declining, these are all helpful events. If we let these events work through this economy, they will prove that the general thrust of policy is on the right track and that Canada, with all its problems today, can look forward to better times.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

Senator Stewart: I wonder if the honourable senator would deal with a question?

Senator Roblin: Yes.

Senator Stewart: I am glad to have the opportunity to ask a person who has had as much experience with government as Senator Roblin has had on this particular question. He said, referring to government social programs, that these programs should give support to people who need the support and should not give support to people who do not need support, a proposition with which few people would quarrel. The problem, of course, is how do you decide who needs support and who does not need support? How do you prevent a vast discretionary bureaucracy building up to make this distinction? Is the honourable senator telling us that our taxation system is so inadequate that we could not tax back from the people who do not need the support the support that would be given to them under universal programs?

Senator Roblin: That is the boogie man that has always been raised. I remember well, in another capacity long ago, I faced the exact same question, because the social welfare system in my own province in those days was based on the principle of need. We were told that this would be destructive of individual privacy, it would be an offence against personal