

[English]

**Hon. David MacDonald (Rosedale):** Madam Speaker, I want to participate in this debate even though I am not usually accustomed to participating in budget debates for several reasons. I know there are many colleagues on both sides of the House who would see themselves as being much better informed and more competent to participate in this debate.

I believe this debate is of particular importance to the country and to all Canadians. I think it is important because it represents, if you like, the fruition of a long process of trying to retrieve fiscal and financial responsibility in this country, a responsibility which started to slip away many years ago under the previous government.

I am not going to spend a great deal of time this afternoon talking about that because I think it has been well documented by many of my colleagues. I do want to make the point very clearly regarding the situation which faced this new government back in 1984. I was not a member of the House at that time, but an observer. I could see that the situation was one which was most unpalatable. It is set out very clearly in the budget document recently produced by the Minister of Finance where he sets out that five years ago program spending exceeded revenues by some \$16 billion. I wonder how it can be that members opposite who were part of that government or supporters of that government can, with such alacrity, criticize this budget for attempting to re-establish fiscal responsibility on the heels of the kind of legacy left to this House and to this country.

In the five intervening years, we have seen a shortfall on program spending revenues of \$16 billion being converted to a \$9 billion surplus. That means a turnaround of some \$25 billion in just five years or an average of \$5 billion a year.

I cannot, for the life of me, think why many people on all sides of this House are not applauding what is an extraordinary turnaround with respect to the financial management of this country.

When I listen to members opposite complaining from the time this budget was delivered that too much has been done in this area, methinks they do complain too much, that they are going for what many people in public

### *The Budget*

life often do, a kind of short term political response which will, in effect, produce real long term damage.

If we were to take seriously the comments made over the past few days on this budget debate—and the comments have been consistent, I have not read or followed each and every speech but comments like too much of this has been cut and too much of that has been cut—I wonder what kind of a budget we would have ended up with? That same dreary criticism has been repeated over and over again during the course of the past five years as this government has tried to put the financial management of this country in order.

I want to say to all members that while a lot has been said and written about the last election, in which I did participate, about what was the key motivating factor that produced a second majority for this party, I firmly believe that the underlying cause was responsibility, responsibility for the financial management of this country. That is the issue that needs to be addressed in this debate, not the specificity of one particular program cut or change as against another but in fact the bottom line responsibility of this government. I have heard far too little. In fact, I have heard virtually nothing spoken to that matter.

On page 1 of the budget, the Minister of Finance said, and I quote:

Every additional dollar of deficit we incur today means an increased burden of debt for future generations. We have a responsibility to our children and grandchildren. To build for them, not to borrow from them.

Surely that is the underlying theme of this budget. I would say that there is no member on our side of the House who is happy with each and every aspect of this budget. We have just heard my colleague from Lotbinière state his concern about the program cut on one particular aspect. We have heard others. We have heard almost repeatedly in Question Period and in debate. It may even be that over the course of the next few months and years there may be ways found to cushion or find new support for programs that are well worth continuing.

Fundamentally, what is at issue here is whether or not the country will have the capacity to deliver on all the programs to all the millions of people, provinces, regions and territories for which we have ongoing responsibility. If we give up for the sake of one, two, a dozen, or even 100 specific criticisms, we forfeit the right to govern