

The Budget

solved by more spending any more than the problems of an alcoholic can be solved by more alcohol.

I have heard members of the New Democratic Party calling for the expenditure of several billions of dollars for job creation. I know a proposal of that sort always has a certain appeal.

One of the features of an opposition party is that it desires to paint the government as one that does not care about the unemployed and the problem of unemployment could be solved if only the government cared enough to spend a few billion extra dollars.

In this case our government would have to borrow those billions of dollars and ultimately pass the responsibility for repaying it to our children and to our grandchildren.

There had been a time when Canadians thought we could go on a spending spree and isolate ourselves from a world-wide recession. Today, however, the unpaid bills of the past have effectively eliminated our room to manoeuvre. Had our predecessors been wiser today we would have had tens of billions of extra dollars each year to spend on those kinds of experiments, but they were not and we do not.

Some opposition members seem to feel that we should be further mortgaging our future for the sake of short-term gain. To those members we can only recommend the example of the premiers of Ontario and British Columbia. The former tripled his deficit and achieved nothing. The latter has now adopted the common sense approach to expenditures that some members of the socialist party have been known to call heartless.

It is not heartless to put long-term stability of Canada ahead of the futile public relations exercise in more government spending. We all must realize that the role of government is to get the fundamentals of the economy right so that people find long-term, meaningful, productive jobs in the private sector.

• (1050)

We cannot throw away the long-term interests of all Canadians to solve what we think will be short-term problems. Bringing spending under control is a very long and agonizing process. We are forced to balance the

present needs of Canadians against the long-term needs of our country.

This budget represents that balance. Some members would seem to prefer that with one breath to protest the decreases in expenditures we have made and then condemn us for not doing enough to lower the deficit.

If I understand the position, we should increase spending, decrease the deficit and lower taxes simultaneously. I am sure that plays well with the dream merchants but it does not provide much substantive input nor does it help Canadians to face up to economic realities.

I should like to make a few comments about my own department, Veterans Affairs Canada. In this budget we have tried to balance the needs of our clients, the veterans of Canada, with the necessity to control spending. Some areas have been increased and others decreased.

There has been a \$22.5 million decrease in war veterans allowance as a result of declines in the client population and shifts to other sources of support in the social safety net of our country.

At the same time as our veteran population ages, however, its health care needs increases. We have made an additional \$100 million available for those needs through purchases of new services, construction of new long-term veterans beds and increased funding for the Veterans Independence Program. At the same time we have increased disability pension benefits by nearly \$65 million.

These measures are an indication of the very sensitive way in which we have tried to control expenditures.

[*Translation*]

Veterans risked their lives to preserve our country's freedom and independence and in return we provide them with the best programs and benefits in the world.

As Minister of Veterans Affairs I am proud of these achievements and Canadians should be proud of them too.

[*English*]

We in Canada have the best veterans affairs programs in the world.