

Or, let them tell you what they would cut if they didn't cut medicare, or old-age pensions, or national defence, or support for schools and hospitals.

The answer is that no such answers exist. The claims of the critics just don't add up. It's as simple as that. This is a test of honesty. Next time someone opposes this tax reform, ask them if they want to continue to subsidize Japan against Alberta, because that is what we are doing now. If they want no sales tax at all, ask them to spell out, in detail, where they will cut \$18 billion in services this year. Ask them to be honest.

We recognize that no tax is popular. There is no such thing as a good tax. But there are bad taxes. And the MST is a bad tax. That's why we're replacing it. That's why we conducted public hearings across the country, and listened to the concerns of Canadians about this tax. And that is why, before Christmas, Michael Wilson announced a reduction in the rate of the proposed tax, and other changes to its operation.

We have put forward all the information that is available to us. We are prepared to meet serious critics with serious answers. But there is an obligation at issue here. The obligation is honesty. The critics of the new tax must either be honest and defend the old tax that hurts Alberta so much or be honest and spell out what deep cuts they propose in existing services in order to allow the tax to be dropped altogether.

My friends, we have a challenge as a country, and as a province. We have bills to pay. We have a deficit to eliminate. We have programs to fund - programs which heal the ill, educate our children, protect our elderly, protect our fishermen and farmers.

We have not simply trimmed expenditures. We have slashed them. We're beyond trimming the fat. We're into the flesh and into the bone. We'll continue to look for new efficiencies, better ways to do things. When we find them, more will be done to reduce expenditures.

There is a covenant to keep. The covenant of fairness and responsibility in taxes. And fairness and responsibility in expenditures. We have kept that covenant. We will do so in the future.