

"Appropriate legislation will be introduced in this Session to ensure, as well, that this Act conforms with the Canadian Charter of Rights."

I know my hon. friend as a diligent member of the Committee on Official Languages, an area in which he and I have taken a special interest.

Yesterday, the Secretary of State and Minister responsible for Multiculturalism (Mr. Crombie), in response to questions by the press finally announced, at least as reported by the Montreal *La Presse*:

"I will likely be working very hard on that aspect," the Secretary of State said yesterday, and he intends to table legislation before Christmas.

I would like to ask the Hon. Member, considering his involvement in these issues, and the fact that since 1969 at least, he has taken a special interest in official languages, has been a member of the committee, has a special interest in the language-of-work issue and how Quebec Anglophones are represented at the Public Service level, and also has demonstrated his interest in the issue of the primacy of the Act over all statutes, and feels that Section 2 of the Act must be given teeth to make it executory and not just declaratory, I would like to ask him: Is he confident that between now and Christmas, the Government can—has he himself been approached officially for input in this major review of the Official Languages Act involving possible amendments by the Government?

Mr. Allmand: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member is aware that the last Speech from the Throne contained promises similar to those made in the 1984 election campaign.

Now this year's Speech from the Throne contains promises that the Government will table a Bill or rather amendments to the Official Languages Act.

So I think that we may have a Bill or rather an amendment in this respect, but whether it will be really acceptable and provide a solution to our problems is another matter altogether. For instance, we know that in many other areas, action was always short of his promises.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The period provided for question and comments has now expired.

The Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp).

[English]

Hon. Jake Epp (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to participate in the debate on the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne. Before I begin my remarks may I take this opportunity to congratulate you on your election to the high office to which you have been elected in the House of Commons.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Address—Mr. Epp

Mr. Epp (Provencher): You, Mr. Speaker, along with a number of us came into the House in the same year. We have gone through some of the same issues over those years. We have seen your dedication not only to your province and to your country but also to issues that touch the individual lives of Canadians, some of which I will be addressing today. I wish you well and God speed.

Many commentators have suggested that only now in the latter half of this mandate has social justice emerged as a theme for the Government. At the same time they suggest that many of the commitments made in the Speech from the Throne are repetitions of earlier promises. The commentators, and I would suggest the Opposition, cannot have it both ways. The facts are these.

First, social justice has been a priority of the Government from day one. We take a back seat to no one when it comes to a concern for the well-being of our people and of Canada's social fabric.

Second, we made a number of commitments two years ago in the social policy field. Today, the record shows that those commitments have been honoured. I checked the previous Speech from the Throne myself and my checking bears out these points.

Third, social justice is not something that can be delivered as a service. It is a quality and a characteristic of our society which must be achieved over time and not by Governments alone. The standard against which performance should be measured is progress. Every session of Parliament in which any of us in this House have sat has embraced the goal of greater social justice. What is different is that this Government faced the reality of unprecedented and severe fiscal constraint. The mark of our commitment to a better society is seen in the social progress that has been made, in spite of such financial pressures.

Fourth, social justice cannot be achieved in isolation from economic renewal or national reconciliation. These terms have been greeted with some cynicism. Does it really matter whether we call support for farmers or help for Canadians living in Atlantic Canada or the Province of Quebec a "social initiative" or an "economic measure"? They are people who need help for a particular problem, people with families, members of the community. To the extent that we can help, justice, whether economic or social, requires that we do so.

I would like to briefly illustrate these facts. On September 24 Statistics Canada reported that in 1985, for the first time since 1980, the average income of Canadian families rose. The same report also told us, again for the first time since 1980, that there was also a decline in the number of Canadians living in low-income households. Furthermore, for the first time since 1981 the lowest income fifth of Canadian families increased their share of total family income after three consecutive years of receiving a smaller share of a then shrinking pie.

Many people questioned the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) when he said "jobs, jobs, jobs". There is a close