

The Budget

In this time when there are changing demands on our forces with the circumstances occurring throughout the world, the military needs this money. I certainly support that. It will have to live within its 5 per cent ceiling.

I should talk to some degree about the grants to business because I have heard some comments there. All across this country I have heard people comment about the fact that we ought to stop giving money to business. Throughout the entire hearing process as we travelled across Canada on the goods and services tax, that was the most favoured presentation by most of the chambers of commerce that appeared before us. Whether they represented rural parts of Canada or urbanized cities, they all supported a stop to these grants to business.

• (1600)

Lo and behold, now that they are in place I hear comments from the Opposition that say: "You can't do that. You can't stop these grants. You have to allow us to spend this money".

Grants are important and assistance is still there, but is it not better that assistance be provided on the basis that if it is such a good idea there will be a return on that particular assistance program to the federal Treasury and to taxpayers and the money will be repaid in reasonable terms and rates? Certainly on that side I think the budget has been very positive.

One of the highlights of the budget is the selling of a portion of PetroCan. I am sure all Canadians will endorse that. When a company is asked to operate in the private sector, it has to be given the tools to operate in full in the private sector. Unfortunately any company owned by the federal government that needs cash has a problem. We cannot give them any. Therefore putting Petro-Canada back into the private sector enables it to operate fully like Canadians would expect it to operate to generate the revenues, to generate investment and to create the jobs that Canada needs. I whole-heartedly endorse the move by the federal government to return Petro-Canada in stages back to the private sector to let it do as it should be doing.

There are numerous other areas of spending that have been addressed. I would like to get into them today but I appreciate that I cannot. I would like to close by saying to

you, Madam Speaker that I appreciate this opportunity to address the House on the budget, particularly knowing that the member for Halifax West allowed me to speak in his place. He was most anxious. We switched places to do this, so I thank the member for the opportunity to speak at this point on the budget.

Mr. Whittaker: Mr. Speaker, in listening to the member's speech he touched on social programs and the fact that they did not cut back on social programs this time around.

However, one area he did not get into to which I would like to direct his attention was that of seniors. In looking at the Estimates we see that the senior's independence program has been cut \$3.5 million and we look at the effect of this budget on seniors in particular.

In looking at the press release the One Voice Seniors Network put out yesterday, I note that it has pointed out that some of the measures of the government which will hurt seniors are the massive cut-backs in social housing. It pointed out that even though it is not in this budget the clawback will be coming into effect and is going to affect them. It also pointed out that through the government's policies and the goods and service tax they will now be paying tax on many things they have not paid tax on before.

I know the member will stand and say that they are going to be in a better position than they were in before because of the rebate system. I would also like the member to point out them that it is only partially indexed to inflation and that in fact they are going to be treading backward in the years to come.

Seniors are now going to be paying tax under the goods and service tax on things like the recreation, golfing, movies, and bowling. They are going to be paying tax on the taxis for those who do not have transportation to go down to the stores in the small communities which do not have public transportation to get their groceries.

We are seeing in the cut-backs to provincial transfer payments problems with social assistance on which many, particularly senior women, depend for top-ups. Those programs now must either be taken over by the province, or more funding has to be put in, or cut back. Similarly the member has talked about the health programs. I would suggest that those will also be hurt.