

Oral Questions

I can assure my hon. friend that the government is fully acquainted with the excellence of the reputation of the base because of the very strong interventions by the member for Brandon—Souris and his colleagues from Manitoba.

* * *

SOCIAL PROGRAMS

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg Transcona): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance. Statistics Canada today published a study which destroys the government's favourite argument that it is social program spending that is the cause of the country's deficit. The study shows that social spending has not increased relative to Gross Domestic Product for the last 16 years.

Will the Minister of Finance take this study seriously, this study which shows that it is corporate tax breaks and the high interest rate policies of successive Liberal and Conservative governments that are the main causes of the deficit? Will the minister take steps to end the generosity of his government to the corporate elite and to wealthy individuals in Canada and show that he is serious about the deficit?

• (1440)

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the hon. member will agree with me when I say that one of our biggest challenges in terms of cost pressures is the cost of servicing the national debt, the national debt we inherited from the Liberals when we took office in 1984.

Yes, this government has been generous toward social programs in this country and it continues to be. For the record, the last five years, in terms of major transfers to the provinces, which is largely for the purpose of sustaining health and education and other benefits that go to help the average Canadian, have increased from the last five-year period of \$150 billion to \$183 billion during this fiscal period.

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg Transcona): Mr. Speaker, with respect, that is not what the study shows. The study shows that social spending has remained the same over the last 16 years. I grant the Minister of Finance that the deficit is in large part due to corporate tax breaks created by the Liberal Party of Canada. But that does not exempt this government from the fact that they have refused to

close many of the main loopholes that still exist from that time.

Will the Minister of Finance give a commitment in this House today, given that the Minister of National Health and Welfare is meeting with his counterparts today and tomorrow, that social spending in this country will not be asked to contribute one more cent to the elimination of the deficit, a deficit that social spending did not create. When will the corporate elite be asked to pay down the deficit?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I just indicated to the hon. member that for the five-year fiscal period ending 1991-92, the amount of federal transfers to the provinces amounted to \$150 billion. For this five-year fiscal period, 1991-92 to 1995-96, it is projected that we will transfer \$183 billion in transfers to the provinces, which is largely used for health, welfare and education. That is not a reduction of revenues, that is an increase in revenues. On a per capita basis, the transfers per person have risen from \$950 to \$1,250 in the last five years. That is not a reduction, that is an increase.

* * *

CANADIAN ABORIGINAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Ms. Ethel Blondin (Western Arctic): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Industry, Science and Technology. The business arm of the Tree of Peace of the Friendship Centre of Yellowknife submitted a proposal to the Canadian Aboriginal Economic Development Strategy for a project which would spell and realize, in the long term, a viable and largely independent economic base in the aboriginal community of the Northwest Territories.

Many would benefit from this particular facility. Why, then, does the government defy its fiduciary responsibility to the aboriginal people by rejecting outwardly this very comprehensive and economically viable proposal?

Hon. Tom Hockin (Minister of State (Small Businesses and Tourism)): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's question is very interesting. The Canadian Aboriginal Economic Development program has been responsible in the last five years for creating over 4,000 small businesses on and off reserves in Canada.