

Government Orders

they pulled this tax and recognized the needs and wishes of Canadians.

• (1310)

Mr. Steven W. Langdon (Essex—Windsor): Mr. Speaker, this is a debate about a bad tax that was brought into effect at the worst possible time. It has seriously damaged the economy and has significantly worsened the recession in this country. It has put not only the small businesses my colleague was talking about a few minutes ago in trouble but has also put thousands of Canadians out of work across this country.

We have seen the economy driven downhill by the negative impact of this tax. We have seen the unemployment rate mount. We have seen this government, despite its constant preaching that prosperity is just down the road, unable to lead Canada out of recession. We have seen the government attack provincial governments to try to give them the blame for a recession in which a poll this morning showed over 70 per cent of Canadians clearly understand is the fault of the federal government and the fault of serious policy mistakes like the goods and services tax.

However, this bill is a shell game. It is a camouflage attempt to try to somehow desperately after the fact add a little bit of sugar, a little bit of honey to this GST that the government has rammed down the throats of Canadians. The government is saying to Canadians that this bill can perhaps be justified, this terrible tax and the unfair way in which it falls on people can somehow be justified by the fact that we are going to use it simply to pay the interest on the national debt and to pay off that national debt. It holds out the prospect to Canadians across this country that the GST is actually going to pay off the national debt.

For people who are terrified by the fact that this government and the Liberal government before it have brought our national debt to the level of \$420 billion, the idea that the GST might somehow solve the increasing level of national debt is something which the government hopes people may respond to positively.

Let me be very clear. The interest payments on the national debt each year cost over \$40 billion. The increase in those interest payments, as the debt continues to rise, will see to it that in the future interest payments alone will go to \$45 billion, \$50 billion and the GST brings in what? It is going to bring in a total of just

over \$16 billion in this present fiscal year. It is going to bring in a total in the next fiscal year of something over \$20 billion.

In other words, the GST makes absolutely no contribution to reducing the national debt. Instead, according to this legislation, the GST is being used not to reduce the national debt, but to pay the interest costs on the national debt.

That is simply one part of the whole range of expenditures which the government makes. It spends money on interest payments for the national debt. It spends money on unemployment insurance. It spends less money than it promised but it still spends money on transfers to the provinces. It spends money to try to do something about help for science in this country.

Why should we take this one area of expenditure on the interest payments for the national debt? It is not the national debt itself but just the interest payments. Why should we take that area of expenditure and single it out for special treatment? There is no logical, rational or sensible explanation for that in terms of saying that spending money on the interest payments of the national debt is more important than spending money on help for science, training people or seeing to it that the provinces keep our health care and education systems going across this country.

Yet that is what this bill before this amendment seeks to do. That is why I urge government members to support it. This amendment seeks to make it possible for the proceeds from the GST to be spent not just to pay interest costs but also to pay for more beneficial and constructive activities like improving training for people in our country. This could be so until a new government is elected and we can get rid of the GST in this country.

It could improve the transfers to the provinces so that our health care system is not under threat. It could improve help to education so that our young people get the kind of educational support that they deserve and that they require.

This amendment simply says that this bad tax is nevertheless generating a good deal of revenue. Let us see to it that this revenue, until we can get rid of the tax, is used to help support things which will build our country for the future like training, education, health care and the improvement of municipal infrastructure.