

The Budget

Before I lose my composure let me say I am really concerned about some of the two-faced comments I have heard on the closing of the military college in Quebec.

[Translation]

Mr. Crête: Madam Speaker, on a question of privilege.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): The hon. member for Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup on a question of privilege.

Mr. Crête: Madam Speaker, the Minister of National Defence is putting words in our mouths that we never said. He is misinterpreting our statements. I am not talking about speeches which were read, but about speeches where he accuses us of being windbags. We are in a situation—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): I am sorry, but this is not a question of privilege. The hon. minister.

[English]

Mr. Collenette: Madam Speaker, there are worse things in life than being accused of speaking in rhetorical tones.

I want to be serious for a moment. What we did yesterday is, as I have said, gut-wrenching. There will be 16,500 people in the armed forces phased out over the next four years. It is going to be tragic for many lives. In a sense we have walked through the lives of many Canadians. We have to show our understanding as members of the sacrifice these people will be making.

We are putting in place a very generous regime to deal with both our uniform personnel and our civilians. In terms of uniformed personnel there are measures such as pensions, annuities and training. For the civilians there will be in a sense a buyout package, training moneys over and above what would normally be coming to them through the workforce adjustment act. We have been discussing these matters with our unions and we hope to have their co-operation. I know it is a bitter pill to swallow.

When hon. members examine the true picture of how we are trying to deal with the people who are losing their jobs, they will see we have been as fair as possible, given the financial situation of the government.

With respect to the communities affected we have a real problem in some areas. I mentioned some of my colleagues from South West Nova, Miramichi, South Shore and Gander. These are poor areas. There is very little industry there. Facilities were surplus. They were facilities that we could not justify keeping open. We will work with those members. We will work with the provincial premiers, especially the three Atlantic premiers concerned, Premier Wells, Premier Savage and Premier McKenna, to try to find uses for those facilities.

• (1730)

As I said last week, there is no magic solution. We just do not have a pot of money to throw at the situation as the previous government did with Summerside. We are going to have a very lean, effective military when this is all done. It will be one of which all Canadians will be proud. In the meantime we have to try to soften the blow as a result of some of these base closures.

I think when all is said and done, after the next few months when the defence review works itself out, Canadians will appreciate the role of defence spending. They will appreciate what good measure for money we get with those taxpayers' dollars, both in our international presence and domestic presence. I hope there will be a well thought out, well crafted policy, one that we can afford.

Again, by doing what we have done in the last few days we have preserved the ability of the sharp end, the ability of the forces to have a very professional, lean, efficient presence, well equipped to be able to go overseas and march with the best because we will have a proud group of people worthy of our Canadian military tradition.

In closing, I would only repeat the words of the Chief of Defence Staff yesterday who appreciated very much the efforts that have been made, especially by those who will be losing their jobs, and the understanding of the forces across the country.

[Translation]

The forces use both official languages.

[English]

Those forces, which are part of the fabric of Canada and help to unify Canada, will get through this difficult time and move on to better things in the future.

Mr. Ian McClelland (Edmonton Southwest): Madam Speaker, I would like to say first of all that before I am a member of the Reform Party, I am a Canadian and a very proud Canadian. I hope that the budget brought down by the Minister of Finance works. This is our country and we need to work together. All of us here are Canadians and all want to be Canadians at the end of the day.

In this budget debate the Minister of National Defence has been explaining the difficult time he has had with the cuts that he has had to be responsible for. I think on balance they have been very fair. The minister is absolutely correct that these are decisions that should have been made 10 years ago. Had they been made 10 years ago, it would not have been nearly as rough today. I personally commend the minister for the good job that I think he has done in that regard.

I do have a question and it has to do with the budget forecast. The budget is relying almost exclusively on an increase in revenues. It is relying on an increase in revenues of about 15 per