

The Budget

will rise to over \$50 billion a year, or almost one-third of the federal budget by the end of this Parliament.

Diverting taxpayers' dollars into paying \$50 billion a year in interest diverts billions of dollars directly away from spending on all other government programs, in particular social spending, since social spending is the largest part of the federal spending program.

In other words, the greatest and most real threat to social programs in Canada is not supposed and imaginary attacks by fiscal reformers, it is the chronic, unrelenting, systematic failure of a Liberal government to get the deficit to zero as quickly as possible.

Until I see an addendum to the budget that clearly projects the impact of rising debt and interest costs on social spending, the impact on seniors, on people on social assistance, on people dependent on the federal government for health care, the budget is lacking in honesty and courage. It is a cowardly and dishonest budget that fails the character test at the point where it is most needed.

This brings me to the equally important character traits of fairness and leadership. The finance minister calls for Canadians to make sacrifices in order to reduce overspending and the deficit. The budget signals future cuts, for example, in unemployment benefits, seniors' benefits, and cuts to social transfers to the provinces. He insists that the spending cuts and tax increases he will impose are guided by fairness.

As the minister has said, however, the devil is in the details. Fairness and leadership call for those at the top of the government to make the first and most visible sacrifice. For this Parliament and this government that means relinquishing the gold plated MPs' pension plan which so many Canadians find obscene and which they regard as the cardinal example of excessive spending at the top of government.

What does the government do? A few days before the budget it brings out a slightly modified MP pension plan—we call it *trough light*—which still offers MPs the most generous pension plan in the country. It contains an opting out clause directed to first time MPs, but it offers millions and millions of dollars in pension benefits to senior ministers and senior backbenchers beyond the wildest dreams of ordinary Canadians. It declares this is pension reform. It declares this is equity and fairness. It declares this is real cost cutting when in fact it is not.

This failure to practice with respect to the MPs' pension plan the principles that the government espouses in the budget points to a flaw in the character of the government.

• (1145)

There is no way in which a government member can vote for the budget with its spending reductions and tax increases and

vote for the gold plated MP pension plan at the same time, without undermining the integrity of the government itself. So what will it be?

It is the intention of Reform MPs to opt out of the MP pension plan. We call upon every other member of the House to do likewise. "Opt out or get out" will be the cry in the constituencies. It is a cry which must be respected if fairness and leadership by example and integrity are to be restored to Parliament and any budget it endorses.

In conclusion, some observers of the budget will say that it brings Canada one step closer to hitting the wall, one step closer to a crisis of confidence on the part of lenders that will drive the dollar through the floor, the interest rates through the roof, grind the economic recovery to a halt and begin the complete unravelling of the social safety net.

Some will say that the failure of the government to eliminate the deficit now, when the economy is in relatively good shape, will leave Canadians virtually defenceless in the face of an economic downturn.

Some will say that the cuts necessary to balance the budget, when they inevitably come, will now be much deeper and much more destructive because the government lacked the courage to act now. Only time will tell.

However, on behalf of Canadians everywhere—taxpayers, employers, employees, consumers, recipients of services and citizens—I say to the Prime Minister, to the Minister of Finance, to every member of the Liberal cabinet, to every member of the Liberal caucus and to every senior civil servant who had anything to do with the preparation of the budget: If the country hits the wall, if the country's social programs hit the wall because of what the budget failed to do, they will be held personally, professionally and politically accountable for the consequences come hell or high water.

I move:

That the amendment be amended by striking out all the words after the word "budget" and adding thereafter the following words:

"for its failure to eliminate the deficit quickly and decisively within the life of this Parliament and by asking future generations to bear the cost of fiscal irresponsibility".

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed listening to the address by my leader, the hon. member for Calgary Southwest. It is the only address I have heard on the budget to this point in the House that actually made any sense.

• (1150)

We saw a budget tabled yesterday that had some tax increases and some spending cuts. However the problem I find is that our total national debt, the GDP ratio, remains unchanged. It is still