

its real purpose. It remains to be seen whether the minister will manage to persuade the various provincial premiers to go along with this kind of harmonization, and all I can say is: good luck. So that is one of the goals of this legislation. The second one is, of course, to extend the programs for two more years.

When we talk about equalization programs, we must understand what this means. Equalization is a legislative program that is usually approved for a period of five years—a federal program, of course. The current legislation which authorizes equalization programs expires on March 31, 1992.

At the meeting of finance ministers on January 30, the Minister of Finance suggested that the federal government should renew equalization programs for a provisional two-year period, from April 1, 1992 to March 31, 1994.

Suppose we look at what this means in the way of additional amounts the federal government wants to give to the provinces, and here I am referring mainly to the so-called poorest provinces, as compared to the other provinces. Renewal of the equalization agreement would involve improvements worth more than \$400 million for the provinces in 1992-93. Of that amount, nearly \$200 million would be permanent improvements, while \$200 million would be one-shot benefits.

• (1300)

As a member from Quebec, I am glad to see that we in Quebec will have a large share of this amount. I believe Quebec will receive nearly \$200 million of the total \$400 million.

We must understand that the purpose of equalization is to help the provinces pay for post-secondary education and health care. This is very important. As the hon. member for the Liberal Party said earlier, equalization is a spin-off of Canadian federalism. Whether you are from Quebec or from any other province, you cannot ignore the fact that this is a benefit of Canadian federalism. And I am very glad to see this happening, because nowadays, we as members from Quebec are trying to explain to our constituents why it is worth while for our province to stay in Canada. Quebecers often ask us: what's the point? What's in it for us? The point is that the federal government gives us this money which, of

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course, is collected in the form of income tax in the first place. Sometimes the money we get back is in proportion to the money collected, and sometimes it is not because the purpose is to give the money to the provinces that need it most.

Now we can, of course, challenge the figures given by the federal government. Is it fair for Quebec to receive such and such an amount, compared with what Ontario or British Columbia are getting? This can go on and on, Mr. Speaker, because as you know, figures can be made to say all kinds of things. It just depends how you want to read them.

So using the figures provided by the minister who led off the debate on this bill, I would like to quote, for each province, what percentage equalization is of provincial revenue. For instance, in Newfoundland, equalization represents 44 per cent of provincial revenue; in Prince Edward Island, 40 per cent; in Nova Scotia, 43 per cent; in New Brunswick, 39 per cent; in Manitoba, 40 per cent; in Ontario, 20 per cent. In Quebec, almost, but not quite, 31 per cent. In other words, that is the money transferred from the federal government to Quebec under equalization programs.

And just for your information, in Saskatchewan it is 27 per cent; in Alberta, 20 per cent; in British Columbia, about 20 per cent; in the Northwest Territories, about 80 per cent and in Yukon, two-thirds or 66 per cent.

Although one can disagree on the accuracy of these figures, one thing is clear: the provinces or territories that have less income to meet their expenses, which are very important, such as those for post-secondary education and health, receive the biggest pieces of the federal pie, if you want. For example, the Yukon receives 66 per cent, the Northwest Territories 80 per cent and the maritimes and Manitoba about 40 per cent.

Would this be a good reason for people in Quebec to say, "We only get 31 1/3 per cent, while other provinces receive 40 per cent of their revenue from the federal government. It is not worth staying in Canada!" I don't think so. If you believe that being Canadian is a social contract, an agreement you make with a government, then it should be done as one would in a family. Not only we but our brothers and sisters have needs, and maybe they need more than we do.