

*The Budget*

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean Landry (Lotbinière, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I paid careful attention to the speech by the hon. member. I have one small question. I heard her say she wanted to make the cuts in the federal budget over three years. I would like her to tell me how they see unemployment insurance in three years' time, what will become of unemployment insurance?

[English]

**Ms. Bridgman:** Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his questions.

When the idea for unemployment insurance was originally conceived it was seen as an insurance program for people temporarily out of work. That concept was very valid at the time. However, over the years there seems to have been a turn around in attitudes.

Let us get back to the original concept and make it the insurance program it was originally intended to be, directed at the people who need it.

**Mr. Dick Harris (Prince George—Bulkley Valley, Ref.):** Madam Speaker, I compliment my colleague on her presentation. The Liberal member opposite asked about the Reform Party's cutting OAS payments to seniors.

The Liberal members have not read the taxpayers' budget. If they had listened to the responses to the question they have asked over and over again in this House about how we are going to treat OAS, they would have heard us clearly say time and time again that seniors who have household incomes over \$50,000 a year would be the only ones affected by the Reform Party budget. It would not be the seniors on lower income, as this Liberal member well knows.

**Ms. Bridgman:** Madam Speaker, I may have been a little weak in my comment to the hon. member. I thank my colleague for clarifying that.

**Mr. Dick Harris (Prince George—Bulkley Valley, Ref.):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak today on this budget. I certainly spoke on it a number of times in my riding. The many hundreds of constituents who turned out to the town hall meetings concerning this budget certainly support the Reform position that this budget is as weak kneed as a Liberal Party can possibly get.

• (1615)

The budget will ensure that before the next election the Liberal government will add another \$100 billion to our national debt. The budget by the Liberal government will ensure our interest payments on the national debt will rise to \$50 billion—plus. All of this will occur before the next election. The Liberal

budget attempts to put a happy face on a deficit target of \$25 billion in 1997.

In examining all of these factors it is difficult to see how any fiscally conscious Canadian could consider this a tough budget as the Liberal Party purports it be or a budget that will, as the Minister of Finance has said, break the back of the deficit. We have heard this break the back of the deficit statement from finance ministers for over two decades. Yet somehow the government remains committed to a position of spending more money than it takes in in a year.

Finance ministers have consistently projected deficits which in reality turned out to be far higher than their forecasts. I would never go so far as to accuse the government and the finance minister of creative bookkeeping or even fudging the numbers. My confidence in the veracity of the numbers in this 1995 budget is about the same as my confidence in the Liberals reforming social programs before there is a referendum in Quebec.

Speaking of numbers, this necessarily brings me to this notion of targets that the finance minister has been so free with. We have listened day in and day out to the Minister of Finance emphatically declare: "We have hit our targets and we will continue to hit our targets in the future".

I guess when your target is the ocean and you are standing on the end of a pier and jump in, it is easy to say that you hit your target. What is meant by that is the target is so broad and so easy to hit. You cannot miss when you put your target so low.

Simply put, the target is low. This 3 per cent deficit to GDP the Liberal government has been so proud of is insufficient. It was labelled so by the IMF, the OECD and the entire Canadian business community. The Liberals know this. The Canadian Chamber of Commerce was arguing for a zero deficit budget by 1997-98 but the Liberals did not have the political guts to commit to a target like that.

Therefore it was up to Reformers to address the real concerns of the Canadian people. That is exactly what we did in our taxpayers budget. That budget was conceived out of input from the Canadian people that was listened to. It was a budget committed to eliminating the deficit in three years and thereby a budget committed to protecting the viability and the core of our social programs.

The Minister of Finance, despite stating before the finance committee that a balanced budget is the ultimate goal, has refused to lay out any plan that details when Canadians can expect a balanced budget. There are no plans and yet he said it. Could it be that like his predecessors, the minister is really not sure of what the actual deficits will be in the future?

• (1620)

We have heard of targets before and we have continually seen them missed before. So let us hear no more pontification from