

strong, united country. I have had exchanges with premiers and territorial leaders to start that process.

To move ahead we will develop a framework within which the process of discussions and negotiations with the provinces can take place. We will identify the essential functions of the federal government of the future, taking into account changing circumstances and priorities.

We want to identify those responsibilities which need to be maintained at the federal level in order to protect the overall national interest and the integrity of the state, as well as those which can best be performed by other levels of government.

We will look for a process to move federal-provincial discussions away from the recrimination and bickering which has too often been seen in the past. Our goal is to reinvent the process of negotiation with the provinces so that it is more productive, so that there is less arguing over turf and more emphasis on solving problems in the interests of citizens.

We want to develop a citizen centred approach to federal-provincial relations. We also want government that is accessible and responsive to citizens' interests and needs. This government recognizes that debt passed from one level of government to another simply winds up on the same shoulders, those of the taxpayers.

In the past there has been a tendency to lose sight of the interests of the public which both governments are elected to serve. Our guiding objective will not be simply disentanglement which suggests the reordering and sorting out of what exists now, but service enhancement which suggests collaborative citizen focused initiatives in which the interests of taxpayers and service recipients are the priority.

In so doing, the federal government is prepared to be flexible, to accommodate different priorities and circumstances, to experiment and innovate and to build on best practices which have been used in different provinces.

Our process will be transparent and open and we welcome ideas and suggestions.

[Translation]

The members of this House have the heavy responsibility, during this last decade of the 20th century, to ensure that the bold wager taken up by the Fathers of Confederation is not lost. This responsibility is ours not only with respect to future generations in our own country but also, and probably even more importantly, toward the have nots of the planet who envy our

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political and social stability, as well as our prosperity, in spite of our present economic and budget difficulties.

• (1520)

[English]

Although serious, these difficulties are not insurmountable. If we in this blessed land cannot resolve our differences and overcome problems which to the majority of the world's people seem at worst manageable then there is not much hope for humanity.

We have been elected by the people of Canada to address our common problems and, above all, to make the very best of our tremendous economic and human resources. We will not shrink from that challenge. We will keep our commitment.

[Translation]

Mr. Benoît Tremblay (Rosemont): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to the President of the Treasury Board and I am filled with dismay. This is the President of the Treasury Board speaking, the man in charge of preparing the government's expenditure budget. That is incredible. I can see that a minister would consider that \$200,000 or so is not too much to pay to go and deliver a speech, that there is no fat to cut in the federal administration, that nobody here is spending too much.

While you are at it, why produce government brochures in only fourteen colours? That is not enough. Why not twenty-two? That is incredible. I suppose that the President of the Treasury Board also considers that there is nothing wrong with building an embassy in Japan on a lot worth over \$1 billion. That is normal I suppose. To have three embassies in Brussels, one for NATO, one for Belgium and one for the European Economic Community, with three ambassador's residences and three reception halls, one each, that is normal too, I suppose.

Now, he is telling us that, to solve the problem, we will refocus the activity of the federal and provincial governments. What has the government done in that area these past few years? Quite simply, the federal government has been pulling out. In that area as in health and post-secondary education, it is pulling out but keeping the tax money. That is incredible. Now the buzz word is refocussing, before that it was harmonizing.

Apparently the federal government will pull out from a number of areas, but it will continue to raise taxes, of course. That is how the federal deficit first got enormous. Then we saw the public finance crisis gradually spread to all the provinces. It is obvious that the federal government has been passing the buck to the provinces for years. As the minister just announced, instead of dealing with the problem from this end, by streamlining and restructuring the federal administration, he will keep passing the buck without making tax transfers. Is that what we are to understand?