

provincial elections since 1966 and who elected me on October 18, 1976, and on May 22, 1979, to represent them in this national institution. My three years in this House have been active and rewarding. I have come to know the country and members on all sides of this House in a way that convinces me beyond all doubt that Canada has immense possibilities. What do we need to realize them? All we need is the initiative, the willingness to work hard, the spirit of enterprise and the risk-taking and vision of our forefathers, whether English or French, or of other nationalities who came to settle in our part of the new frontier of North America.

[Translation]

My dear friends, a new era is opening before us. We will meet an extraordinary challenge. We will achieve the potential of the most beautiful country in the world.

[English]

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Crosbie: This is an "achieve our potential" budget. This is a realistic budget that faces the facts and sets out our view of how Canada can realize its potential. Laurier said that the 20th century belonged to Canada. That prophecy may not yet be realized. But if our fiscal and energy policies are adopted, the 1990s will indeed belong to Canada.

This budget is a "first" in several respects. It is the first which it is my privilege to present to this House; the first of the new government; the first federal budget ever presented by a Newfoundlander; and the first Progressive Conservative budget in 17 years. Perhaps most important, it is the first budget of a new era in the economic and financial affairs of this country—an era of new realism and an economic climate to provide improved opportunities and incentives for Canadians.

Since last May, I have met with finance ministers from many countries. I have discussed our economic and fiscal problems with my provincial colleagues. I have listened to the views of business and labour leaders throughout Canada. I have sought advice from economists in universities, research institutes and business corporations.

All these contacts and the independent advice offered at the Tokyo Summit by the IMF, the OECD and the Economic Council of Canada—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Crosbie: Hon. gentlemen do not know what those initials represent. All these contacts have strengthened my conviction that four overriding considerations should guide this budget.

● (2010)

The first is that the Canadian economy has great potential and offers brighter prospects than almost any other country in the world. Second, our economic performance, which has been disappointing during the 1970s, can be improved substantially by improving the framework of economic incentives for private

The Budget—Hon. John C. Crosbie

individuals and firms. Third, to be successful our policies must face realistically the problems posed by energy costs and shortages and the huge and swelling budget deficit which we inherited from our Liberal predecessors. And finally, our policies must focus more than in the past ten years on the medium and longer-term potential and opportunities of the country and less upon fine-tuning in the short run and the political subterfuges of the moment.

The need for a new approach is apparent from our experience during the 1970s. In broad terms, the performance of the economy has been about half as good on average as during the 1960s. Our rates of price inflation and unemployment have been roughly twice as high and our rate of productivity growth has fallen by half. Over the past five years, productivity growth, the essential source for increases in the living standards of Canadians, has approximated zero.

This deteriorating performance reflects a number of factors, some beyond our control. These include international developments such as the huge increase in energy prices and the unhappy combination of slower economic growth and general price inflation found in most countries, including the United States. In addition, domestic developments such as changes in the composition and location of the population and changes in labour force participation have been outside the control of government.

In addition to these unavoidable influences, however, part of the reason for our disappointing economic performance during the past decade has been the failure of governments, particularly the federal government, to face up to economic reality and to make the most of the country's opportunities. In my view, one of the main reasons Canadians elected a new government last spring was to set a new and realistic course for this country. This I and my colleagues are determined to do even if it means risking some unpopularity, hopefully short-term. We are committed to the proposition that in the longer run good economics is good sense and thus good politics.

CHALLENGES FACING THE NEW GOVERNMENT

What are some of the challenges we face as a government charting a new course? There has been little or no productivity growth during the past five years. This year prices have been rising at almost 10 per cent. This is the seventh year in a row in which prices have been rising in the range of 7½ to 11 per cent. Unemployment is about 7½ per cent, below the rate in 1977 and 1978, but still high, especially in certain regions of the country, such as my own native isle, Newfoundland.

In addition, two yawning "gaps" large or Liberal gaps, have emerged in the economy, the Government of Canada deficit and the deficit in the current account of the balance of international payments. At present, federal government expenditures exceed revenues by 25 per cent and the size of the deficit exceeds the total size of the budget in our centennial year of 1967. Our current account deficit is equal to over 2 per cent of the Gross National Product, that is, over 2 per cent of