

*Supply*

the government systematically dismantle our social programs, our regional development programs, and to categorically turn away from people in Atlantic Canada, particularly Cape Breton Island. That is not an accident. They have just chosen to do that as a priority. It is an insensitivity that I just cannot understand. As a Canadian I feel very, very betrayed by this, and as a parliamentarian this sense of betrayal is even greater.

• (1740)

I would like to say that the people in Cape Breton Island are as strong Canadians as any group in this great country. They fought bravely during the two world wars and the Korean conflict, they have flown the flag with pride, at every opportunity they choose at their own volition to demonstrate their love for their country. One looks at them and says these are true Canadians because their government is not doing anything for them. Yet in spite of the arbitrary and derogatory treatment they are receiving, they remain great Canadians and proud Canadians.

**Mr. Greg Thompson (Carleton—Charlotte):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to take part in the debate today on this very, very important motion. With regard to the member who just spoke, although we are on different sides of the House, I think we have a great deal in common. I start out by saying that for a particular reason.

Today I met with a minister from the Atlantic Baptist Federation. He is meeting with various members of Parliament, parliamentarians on all sides of the House. It was very refreshing. I met with him just minutes before Question Period and we spent I guess 15 or 20 minutes together. It was very refreshing because as a minister and as a concerned citizen, and as a church, they want to know what they can do for individual members of Parliament and what they can do for Canada as a country in the next coming months. They are no different than any other church or any other denomination, but I think it was very refreshing to see this individual and his people visit Parliament and take an active role in what we are doing here and maybe how they can help us.

That is sort of the theme of today's debate. What can we do to improve the situation that we presently have,

and I wanted to say presently enjoy in Atlantic Canada but I don't think we can take too much enjoyment in it.

To go back to some of the remarks made by the previous member, he mentioned that the government would have Canadians believe that everything is going well in Atlantic Canada. That is simply not the case. The government clearly recognizes that we have huge problems in Atlantic Canada. Some of those problems have been with us since Confederation, there is no question about that. It is a reality that we may have attempted to ignore in past years, but this government certainly is not ignoring that.

What we are talking about here are transfers of federal dollars, just so the people back home will know. It is a transfer of federal dollars from within this Confederation back to the poorer regions of this country. What it simply means again is it is taking moneys from other provinces and putting it into some of the have not provinces of this Confederation.

In the last year or so none of us questioned that we have gone through a very difficult economic climate. We are in a recession. The government clearly has admitted that. But the problem that that creates for Atlantic Canada is that the provinces that usually have the economic clout, the money, to put into some of these poorer regions simply do not have it. If you take a very close look at where those federal dollars have come from in the last number of years, it basically boils down to three provinces. Moneys are being transferred to the poorer regions of this country from provinces like Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia. That has been the story of this Confederation in regard to equalization payments, those transfers to the poorer provinces, so that the poorer provinces can distribute the kinds of services and programs to their people as the rich provinces can do.

Part of the reality is that these provinces have had a huge slowdown in their economies. The province of Ontario, for example, has had a huge slowdown. B.C. has experienced the same thing and so has Alberta. That is why the transfers to provinces like my province are being reduced. It is not as if we are out to punish the provinces, but we simply have to work by a formula that was established long before most of us arrived here in this House.