

[Translation]

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Human Resources Development insists on trivializing the negative impact his social reform will have on all students in Canada.

He is cutting transfers to the provinces for post-secondary education, while suggesting an option that is likely to increase debt levels among Canadian students.

Does the minister realize that what he is offering Canadian students in his reform package is the prospect of leaving university with an average debt of \$50,000 and having to make monthly payments of \$600 for ten years, to pay back a debt that thanks to the minister will have increased 100 per cent?

• (1430)

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member accused me of trivializing. I would say, to counter what the hon. member has said, that he has certainly been guilty of seriously misinforming people about what the facts are, more than once. In fact I would say his entire question was based on a totally false premise.

First, we are not cutting the transfers to the provinces. They are being held at the 1993-94 level of about \$6.1 billion. That continues. That is not a cut. Because the hon. member is one of the great exponents in the House of provincial rights, he should know that increasingly the transfer is through tax revenues to the provinces. They make decisions about tuition. They decide what the increases will be. They decide what the curriculum will be. They decide what the universities will do.

If the hon. member has any criticism about what is happening in universities, it would seem to me he should turn around and talk to his counterparts in the provinces and ask them why they do not spend the federal transfer money, which accounts for 50 per cent of all funding for universities, effectively on behalf of higher education.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister knows perfectly well that the presidents of universities and community colleges in Canada intend to double tuition fees very shortly, as a result of the minister's reform package. He cannot deny that.

Oral Questions

No government in the past has hit students as hard as the Liberal government intends to do now. There is still time for the government to reverse its decision.

Will the minister make a commitment to the thousands of students standing in front of Parliament that he will withdraw these proposals that would doom students to poverty?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unlike the hon. member and his colleagues who have from day one taken a totally negative attitude toward any reform at all, we are saying to the students today, as I offered their leaders in the meeting this morning and as I offered student leaders across the country when I met with them: "Let us come together and look at this problem. Let us reform the situation. Let us examine the facts. Let us get the proper things on the table".

[Translation]

Let us see what we can achieve by working together to improve the post-secondary education system.

[English]

The fact of the matter is that every person in the country except the hon. member in the Bloc Québécois knows that change or reform is required.

The more we invite our students, our faculty and our administrators to become part of the process of discussion, the better the reform will be, as opposed to the position taken by the hon. member.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary North, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, last month in the House the Minister for Human Resources Development said he supports a system of broader, wider grants for students to use as a way of replacing federal transfers to provinces for post-secondary education.

Will the government adopt yet another Reform Party proposal, namely the advanced education voucher system which would transfer greater control from bureaucrats to individual students?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is a participant in the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development. That committee is now holding hearings across the country and receiving a wide variety of ideas.

If the member has a particular proposal on behalf of her party, certainly I would welcome looking at it as part of the report of the committee. We have an open, democratic, parliamentary process able to enlist all the good ideas and even get some of the bad ones as well.