

Government Orders

The finance minister should have been honest and open with the Quebec and the Canadian people. He should tell them that these cuts to the provinces mean the end of our health care system as we know it now, because that is the real issue here.

Look, for example, at the recent statements made by the prime minister and the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, who contradicted the Minister of Finance who said, and I quote: "The conditions of the Canada Health Act will be maintained. For our government, those are fundamental."

How can the Minister of Finance still imagine and argue that Quebec and the other provinces will be able to continue to deliver the same quality of health care services to the people? How can Quebec and the other provinces implement the five principles of the Canada Health Act imposed by Ottawa when the Minister of Finance passes on to them billions of dollars of deficit by means of cuts to the social programs?

The Minister of Finance should have shown courage and tell upfront to his fellow Canadians: "Unfortunately, because of the errors we have made, mainly in the Chrétien and Lalonde budgets, we can no longer afford our health care system as we know it now".

Instead of assuming his responsibilities, the finance minister is trying to get out from under them. The government shuns its responsibilities when it passes its deficit on to Quebec and the other provinces. This government is misleading the Canadian people by not telling them that the health care program is doomed because of this budget.

Let me conclude by saying that this budget is misleading, since it does not mention the cuts that are still to come. It widens the gap between the rich and the poor in our society and puts an end to a good number of features of our social programs.

Canadians must know that. Quebecers in particular must be aware of it before they make a final judgment on the federal regime, which obviously fails to solve its own problems and, even more, to renew itself according to the expectations of Quebecers.

[English]

Mr. Lyle Vanclief (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Agriculture and Agri-food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is certainly a pleasure to comment for a few minutes this afternoon on the budget that was presented this week.

I want to start by passing on the comments that I made to members of the press in my riding when I spoke to them on budget night. When asked what my reaction was I said it was one of excitement because this is not the first budget that I have seen. I certainly have not been present for the considerable number that some members in the House have, but this is the seventh one.

This budget fulfils the expectations and hopes for the majority of Canadians. I have been telling my constituents for the last number of weeks and months as they offered suggestions to the government that our challenge was to meet the requirements out there with fair and equal treatment for everyone along with being effective. We met those criteria.

We know that two situations in Canada today are clouding the issue. One is the uncertainty of the future of the province of Quebec. I am pleased to say that the majority of the people in Prince Edward—Hastings say: "My Canada includes Quebec".

Fortunately for all of us, more and more Quebecers are realizing that every day and they have every reason to. More and more Quebecers are realizing that a strong central government is what is good for this country and what is good for everybody. All of us will be better off as Canadians and as human beings if we are part of the family we call Canada.

The finance minister pointed to the second cloud which is the debt and the deficit. I do not have to remind anyone of the size of that: over \$500 billion in debt, a \$42 billion deficit a year ago, some \$80,000 a minute to cover the interest on it, and I could go on.

I need to say no more in emphasizing the fact that the government has a tremendous challenge. Our country has a tremendous challenge. This challenge can only be successfully met with competence, compassion, reform and hope. We made a great step toward that on Monday night with the budget.

We have been honest with Canadians by saying that we too know there is a lot more yet to do. What we did on Monday night was done by pushing the needed measures as close to the edge as possible and doing it without playing havoc with the economy which is growing at a faster rate than just about any other country in the world. Certainly it is the fastest of any of the G-7 countries. Things are on the move. Perhaps they are not moving as fast as we would like but they are certainly on the move and they are going in the right direction.

We knew we were being watched. We were being watched by the international community, by the money markets, the domestic financial institutions, the domestic money markets, the business community. We were being watched by everyone, including all Canadians.

We did what was needed but we did not enjoy it. I can say we did not want to do it because it is not nice to say that we are going to reduce employment, that we are going to have to make some changes. When I say we did not want to do it, it was not because it did not need to be done. It did need to be done. As the Prime Minister has said so clearly and so often, we did it because it was necessary.

It reminds me of some advice I gave to the finance minister leading up to the budget and the slogan used by the prominent company, Nike: Just do it. And we did it. We did it by making \$7 worth of cuts for every \$1 increase in revenue. We did it after