

medicare, protecting the benefits of the elderly, and ensuring an adequate distribution of revenue across the country through programs like equalization, this budget ensures that no erosion of national standards will occur.

It is for that reason that the equalization program was not changed. The budget makes it clear that equalization will continue to grow. Indeed, with respect to programs for the elderly, any reform of benefits will be done with full regard to continuing undiminished protection for all seniors who are less well off and the full indexation of seniors' pensions in order to protect them from inflation.

In short, honourable senators, what this budget does is fulfil the commitments made in the Red Book. I must say that I am delighted to find senators opposite quoting from the Red Book, and I think it is a sign that their literacy is substantially greater than people such as myself might have expected.

Page 11 of the Red Book. It states:

Economic growth is not a matter for market forces alone. Jobs, health care, a safe and sustainable environment, equality for women and men, care for the very young and the aged, and the alleviation of poverty are societal issues that cannot be addressed simply by having each individual aggressively pursue immediate, narrow self-interest.

That is why there is a role for the federal government in setting national standards. That is why this budget and the program of this government will aggressively pursue that position.

This budget takes a balanced approach. It has also met some very tough issues. This Minister of Finance has shown himself willing to take on many of the tough decisions that previous ministers of finance of the last eight or nine years have really talked about but not actually implemented. This budget actually makes those tough decisions while, at the same time, keeping an eye toward imposing a minimum of hardship on individual Canadians and calling on all sectors of society to make some modest sacrifice in the interests of putting our fiscal house in order.

That is why the forecast in this budget will be met. That is why the commitments made in the Red Book and the 1993 election campaign will be met. That is why I believe that this budget is the first step in putting the country on a path to sustained economic growth and fiscal responsibility.

This budget is truly fair to all Canadians and to all regions of the country. It is a budget that will have a lasting impact as it begins to redefine the role of the federal government in Canada. I honestly believe that this budget is not only reform minded, but also consistent with all of the things that this party has stood for over the last 20 to 30 years, and, therefore, I am very proud to support it.

Hon. Noël A. Kinsella: Will the honourable senator entertain a few questions?

Senator Kirby: Absolutely.

Senator Kinsella: Many Canadians are puzzled by the articulation of one set of principles, the reflection of an ideology which we find when we examine the record of Liberal opposition

[Senator Kirby]

over the past nine years, another set of principles identified in the Red Book, and yet another vision as we attempt to understand this budget. Is it the honourable senator's position that there is absolute congruency between all three expressions of policy?

Senator Kirby: It is difficult to understand exactly what are the three differences mentioned by the honourable senator, but I will try to explain. Certainly, I think even the honourable senator would find it difficult — perhaps not impossible, but difficult — to make a believable case that there is a significant difference between the commitments made in the Red Book during the election campaign and this budget. In fact, the budget implements what we said we would do during the election campaign. I think that takes care of the second and third case.

The honourable senator's first premise is an interesting one in that essentially it argues that because this party, when it was in power in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, started a series of programs that were right for the time, a modification in those programs in a different time, in a different economic climate, in a different social climate, is a violation of Liberal principles. I would counter that argument by stating that in fact the world of public policy is not a static one. It is a world in which the appropriate public policies for any given time need not be the same as the public policies of 20 or 30 years ago. Change does not make any comment on the correctness of the policies of 20 or 30 years ago at the time that they were made.

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If your point is that some of the principles being espoused today in the Red Book — which are very consistent — are different from the policies of the immediate post-war era, I would not argue that. However, we do live in significantly different economic times. Any party that attempts to stick to something because it was the right idea 40 or 50 years ago is doing a disservice to itself as well as to the Canadian people. The reality is that times change.

Senator Lynch-Staunton: Principles do not count.

Senator Kirby: I cannot resist the comment. It is an interesting question as to what you elevate to the level of principle.

When your party was in power, it was always difficult for me to tell what the level of principle was. Upon reading and listening to budget speeches by Mr. Wilson and others, I was frequently reminded of a great political line from John Mitchell. Some of you may recall he was the Attorney General of the United States under Richard Nixon. When he was asked at one point to explain the inconsistency between what he was saying and what he was doing, he responded, "Watch what I do, not what I say."

I find it semi-amusing, therefore, that the issue of principle should be raised by members of a party for whom there was a huge discrepancy on many occasions between what they said and what they did. I have difficulty when you attempt to raise something to the level of principle because your own principles were incredibly flexible, over time.

Hon. John Lynch-Staunton (Leader of the Opposition): I find that a remarkable answer, particularly because in the budget we find many Conservative policies that were ridiculed only a few years before by the Speaker and his colleagues on the other side.