

The Address

The hon. member also made a very careful analysis of the two perverse consequences of a possible reduction in transfer payments for health care. First of all, there would be a reduction in services. And, as she so astutely pointed out, the neediest members of our society would suffer most because they are unable to pay the user-fee or health tax that might be introduced by the province if transfer payments were cut. They would either postpone medical appointments or not go at all.

Furthermore, as I pointed out myself, this might increase the tax burden, because if the federal government reduces transfer payments to the provinces, that does not necessarily mean it will lower its tax rates. Consequently, the provinces will have to pick up the slack, either by increasing their own tax revenues or by asking residents for a bigger contribution to the health care system. And this illustrates the other perverse effect I was mentioning previously. It is a kind of vicious circle: increased burden for the taxpayer on the one hand, and reduced services on the other. I believe, therefore, that the perverse consequences are too important to even consider a reduction of transfer payments to the provinces.

● (2110)

Besides, I would like to point out, Mr. Speaker, that the Prime Minister promised not to cut transfer payments to provinces. However, we will have to watch carefully to make sure that those payments are not frozen at their present level, since that would amount, in the long run, to a reduction equivalent to inflation. The government will have to keep the promise it made during the campaign and index transfer payments to provinces to the consumer price index.

[English]

Mr. Harry Verran (South West Nova): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate you on your appointment to the Chair. Your guidance and leadership will be appreciated by all in this House.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak in this first session of the 35th Parliament as a duly elected representative for the riding of South West Nova. It is a pleasure, indeed an honour to have been elected by the people of South West Nova to represent them and to bring their concerns to the government and to this House.

The Prime Minister and this government have been given a clear mandate by the people of Canada to implement the programs as outlined in the now famous red book.

South West Nova is a riding in the southwestern part of Nova Scotia. It was represented by Coline Campbell for many years. Coline did not seek re-election this time and I want to wish Coline and her husband Ron, God speed and good health in the future.

South West Nova is a riding rich in history and dates back to Champlain's landing in 1604. The riding has a diverse cultural mix of native Canadians as well as English and French speaking people. As a matter of fact, the Acadians in South West Nova proudly celebrated their 225th anniversary this past year with festivities mainly centering in and around the University of St. Anne at Church Point in the district of Clare. This small degree granting university has the distinction of having the best immersion program in this country.

I want to say that I intend to maintain a close personal relationship with the people of my riding and to the best of my ability give them personal service.

For generations our people have made their living through the use of natural resources, the sea, the land and the forests. However, in recent years our people have found it difficult to make a living from those resources. The fishing industry has been crippled mainly because of mismanagement.

Our ground fishermen are second to none in this country and have co-operated with management to help keep this fishery alive. The thanks these same fishermen received in return for their co-operation from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans was a mid-season quota cut which resulted in great monetary loss for bought quota and a reduction of 40 per cent in their catches.

These fishermen were betrayed and lost all trust in the department of fisheries. Our fishermen want better management of these fishing industries where justice and fairness play leading roles. The fishermen of South West Nova want to work and they want to fish.

● (2115)

Recently I had the privilege of meeting with the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to voice my concerns for those fishermen of South West Nova. I am pleased the minister indicated to me and to the deputy minister that he too wanted fairness in his fisheries policies so that the people in the industry could regain that lost trust.

The fishermen want to co-operate but insist they must have some input into the decision-making process. I am pleased that at a meeting with the minister of fisheries just today he again reinforced his commitment to visit the fishermen in South West Nova in the very near future. I will be reminding the hon. minister when the near future is here.

In the forest industry our riding is also experiencing some problems. Small woodlot owners have great difficulty trying to