

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

THE BUDGET

FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF MINISTER OF FINANCE

The House resumed consideration of the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government; the amendment, and the amendment to the amendment.

Mr. John Harvard (Winnipeg St. James, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to offer my congratulations to the Minister of Finance on his presentation of yesterday's budget, a budget in my opinion that was fair and balanced. I think it meets the first test that was put down by all Canadians, that it had to be fair and balanced, fair to all Canadians, all individuals and all regions. The finance minister has succeeded in doing that, at the same time making a major effort in bringing down the deficit and the debt and getting government right for the first time in a good many years.

I rise in the House today not only to address the budget which was introduced yesterday but also to comment on a disease which I see gripping Canada, a disease which becomes more visible and widespread during events like this budget debate. It is a disease born from a lack of understanding, compassion and acceptance. It is a disease which focuses on self. It is a disease perpetuated by individuals, businesses, media types and hon. members alike. I am referring to what I call the culture of victimization.

This culture is both painted and exacerbated with brushes almost exclusively from the political right. I believe that in the last 10 years there has been an alarming increase in the perception that we, each and everyone of us, is a victim. Canadians are victims. We live in fear of further victimization. In truth, I believe that this paranoia has created a society in which we are all victims of something out of necessity.

We are victims of crime. We are victims of taxes. We are victims of government. We are victims of big corporations. We are victims of interest groups. We are victims as westerners. We are victims as Quebecers. We are victims as easterners. We are victims if we speak English. We are victims if we speak French. We are rarely just people who share a single common bond. However, we do have that common bond. We all are Canadians. It is this undeniable fact that we are all Canadians upon which the Minister of Finance has based his budget.

• (1505)

The \$7 expenditure reduction for every dollar in new tax revenue is not a burden attributable to one type of Canadian but to all Canadians. If we are all affected, can we possibly all be

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victims? As I listened to some hon. members opposite I hear those ominous words reinforcing the notion that we are victims.

Some interest groups and even provinces which did not get what they wanted from this budget have said that this government has not been straight with them. Like spoiled children, our critics demand more for themselves with little or no regard for others. At the same time they demand greater fiscal restraint and usually expect someone else to shoulder their burden.

They tell Canadians to believe, really to expect that it is the government's responsibility to make things better for themselves. It is the government's job to make life happier: "If life is not the way I think it should be it is because that big, mean government machine will not let me succeed, for I am a victim". We have all in some way contributed to the creation of this culture in which we perceive ourselves as helpless victims.

For example, economic indicators suggest that Canadians are recovering from the recession of the early 1990s. Yet a certain trauma lingers. The Minister of Finance surpassed his 1994 cost cutting goals and yet the opposition howls. Program spending will be reduced by about \$10 billion and that is a benefit to all Canadians. The opposition howls again: "What about me?"

In many ways, and thanks to the critics, Canadians have become more dependent on government. Government is expected to ensure that we all have jobs and also accommodate our every whim. Government is even expected to bandage our scratches. We have become less reliant on ourselves and on our own abilities. Thus we have let ourselves become victims. We cannot think only of ourselves. Nor can we accept this characterization that we live in a culture of victimization.

Kennedy was right when he said our privileges can be no greater than our obligations. The protection of our rights can endure no longer than the performance of our responsibilities.

Reformers would have us slash and burn programs and services to all Canadians; let us cut deeper and indiscriminately. The political right in this country would never have conceived the notion of compassion and human understanding as demonstrated by the introduction of the new Canada social transfer to the provinces.

It is true that money to the provinces will be reduced as a means of getting our financial house in order. This action cannot and should not be viewed as an indirect means of attacking individuals. Rather, such action demonstrates our commitment to getting government right by reducing overlap and duplication.

Canadians are being presented with the opportunity to help create and develop a more mature fiscal federalism. Through initiatives like the Canada social transfer the government has met the requirements needed to accommodate citizens' con-