

Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): At this time we will proceed to questions and comments. I was about to say that before we entered into the other debate. I will recognize the Hon. Member for Mount Royal (Mrs. Finestone) on questions and comments.

Mrs. Finestone: Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague with a great deal of interest, particularly as he quoted Chief Justice Brian Dickson. The Chief Justice also said that it has been said by many people that education is too important to be left to educators. He went on to say that while that may be true it is also true that education is too important to be left to Ministers of Finance.

The governing Party, which the electors put into office to carry out certain mandates, has a responsibility to develop a philosophy and policy to reflect its commitments and concerns. I bring to the attention of my hon. colleague and the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) that at the Quebec caucus meeting held in Sherbrooke on July 26, 1984, the Conservative Party promised to:

—respect the federal obligation to fund provincial health care through Established Programs Financing, and make additional funds available to the provinces on a cost shared basis for the establishment or enrichment of programs deemed most likely to improve the general level of health and limit long-term costs. This determination to be made following a national conference of health ministers and health care professionals.

The Conservative Party made many other promises. One was to increase research and development expenditures to 2.5 per cent of GNP. They went on to say:

Our research and development commitment is fundamental to our over-all programs for economic and social development. We are committed to doubling Canada's R and D budget to 2.5 per cent of GNP.

Perhaps there was a lack of understanding, a lack of commitment, or a number of other factors which have come into play. The Minister seems to be preoccupied with transferring the federal deficit to the backs of other people and other interests within our society. My hon. friend read into the record the concerns of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Ontario and Quebec. When I brought this issue to the attention of the House the Members from Quebec said that the Quebec Minister of Finance did not understand what was going on. I have the feeling he understood very well.

Mr. Hamel, the President of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce said that the business community is increasingly concerned that the squeeze on post-secondary education funding will make it impossible for universities to meet the demand for research and development or even to provide adequate basic training which will then be transferred to businesses so that they can become competitive in this increasingly competitive world. Mr. Anderson, the President of the Canadian Association of University Teachers said:

Proposed federal cuts to post-secondary education could place a university education beyond the reach of many students—

Canada prides itself on equal and fair treatment and access. What happened to fairness, consultation and all those other wonderful promises?

Donald Savage, the President of CAUT said that the consequence is poor quality education. Mr. Shapiro, the President of the Social Science Federation of Canada said:

Canada's entry into free trade discussions with the U.S. provides a clear example of the importance of an educated public and a strong national identity to "preserve our sovereignty"—

I think Members across the way ought to think about that. If the Government recognized that as a fundamental value, that the Canadians like being Canadians and being different and do not want to be the fifty-first state of the United States, it might put more money into post-secondary education, R and D and support for our health services, the things which we all value which distinguish us as Canadians. I wonder if my hon. colleague would care to comment?

Mr. Rompkey: I certainly would, Mr. Speaker. I consider this to be one of the most important topics that we can talk about in the House. My colleague has said it better than I. She has put on the record the growing opinion of eminent spokesmen across the country about what is happening. She made the point about the maturity of Canada now. We are entering into a period in which we will have to compete in an increasingly small and more competitive world. The Government of Canada is telling us that it wants to get into a free trade situation so that mature Canadian businesses can compete head to head. We on this side are saying that it should be multi-lateral, that Canada should be competing head to head with countries throughout the world.

Eminent authors have said that Canada is coming of age in the 1980s and 1990s. We are throwing off our sense of inferiority and coming out from under the shadow of the United States. We are becoming a mature nation with mature businesses which can compete anywhere in the world. However, a mature nation must have an educated and aware population which can take advantage of those opportunities. You cannot have a trade, financial or industrial strategy unless you have an education strategy. They must go hand in hand. Canada does not have that. At the same time as the Government of Canada is talking about trade, an industrial strategy and job creation, it is cutting back on the funds which our young people need to give them the wherewithal to take those jobs and compete with other people in the world.

There is absolutely no comparison between our educational policy and that of Japan or West Germany. My colleague is absolutely right when she says there must be a commitment to post-secondary education. It is not there at present. She has said that even the back-benchers of that Party opposite have said the Government must make that commitment to R and D and post-secondary education.

• (1250)

I simply say to the Government once again that it must change its mind. If you have to do something about the deficit, and you do, do not, for goodness' sake, do it on the backs of our young people. Do not call on them to shoulder the burden. Give them the chance to compete for the jobs you say you are