

[English]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Leon E. Benoit (Vegreville, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, Reformers have always recognized the need to cut government spending and the need to empower people to take care of themselves when they are able to do so. Reformers also believe that before cuts are made, barriers should be decreased and flexibility increased so that people are able to do well in a freer market setting. Farmers share this vision.

Yesterday Department of Agriculture spending was cut substantially. Farmers and industry leaders say these cuts will be difficult but recognize they are necessary.

I am concerned however that in moving toward a more market driven system, the government has not removed regulatory barriers and has not allowed for increased efficiencies. Without these changes farmers and industry will be crippled instead of strengthened by these funding cuts.

In order for farmers to adapt to new fiscal realities they need stability, predictability and certainty. Farmers need the freedom to recoup some of the losses incurred by this budget. The government has failed to deliver.

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[Translation]

RIDING OF BROME—MISSISQUOI

Mr. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is the first time I rise in this House and I want to take this opportunity to thank the people of Brome—Missisquoi for placing their confidence in me in the February 13 byelection.

I want to reiterate my commitment to make every effort possible to deliver the high level of service my constituents expect.

[English]

I am proud to join the forces of the Liberal Party of Canada in the House of Commons. I have asked the constituents of my riding to have confidence in the government. After less than a week on Parliament Hill I see the government will not let the Canadian population down.

The delicate financial situation of the country urgently needed to be addressed. A courageous and fair budget has been tabled. The country is now on the right track.

• (1415)

[Translation]

Senior citizens are protected, the tax burden of low and middle income families has not increased and the government will be streamlined and better managed. I undertake to be actively involved in the job creation and economic renewal

Oral Questions

process in the riding of Brome—Missisquoi and I want to thank my colleagues in the Liberal caucus who have already assured me of their support in the pursuit of these goals.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[Translation]

THE BUDGET

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in its prebudget marketing blitz, the government announced that it would table a budget for a new Canada. The Minister of Foreign Affairs even went as far as to say, with a reformist zeal very uncharacteristic of him, that the status quo would no longer be an issue after the budget. However, what the promised decentralization really boils down to is Ottawa continuing to withdraw its funding for health, post-secondary education and welfare.

My question is for the Prime Minister. Where is this new Canada that was announced with great fanfare when all the government did yesterday was to offload \$7 billion or so more onto the provinces?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the budget tabled yesterday, we decided to give provinces much more flexibility in the administration of their programs and we are trying to improve the situation for everybody. It will be easier for provinces to establish their programs themselves, provided they respect the aspirations of all Canadians, that is that there be minimum programs for all Canadians so that the dignity of persons will be respected across Canada. I think this budget reflects the willingness and capacity of this government to propose changes.

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition, BQ): Mr. Speaker, how can the Prime Minister have the audacity to claim that while depriving provinces of \$7 billion he gives them more flexibility and more capacity to innovate in social programs, when provinces already have an extremely difficult time dealing with their growing expenses in the areas of health, social assistance and education?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, provinces had been asking us for a very long time to remove certain conditions which applied to the administration of social assistance programs, and that is what we are now proposing.

As for health care services and the five conditions set in the federal Health Act, everybody in Canada agrees that they should be maintained because they are the very essence of our society and they give people access to the same health care system, regardless of one's financial circumstances.