

Government Orders

I would like to spend a few minutes talking about the wage freeze which is a good idea. It is a particularly good idea in the House because we are the leaders of our country. The people at the top of the heap in any circumstance, especially a difficult one, should be the first to take a hit. A wage freeze in the House is entirely appropriate. It is entirely appropriate in the upper echelons of the public service.

However we have to do more than just say we are going to freeze the wages. We have to look at how we could get the most efficiency out of the money we are spending. We can bet that people in any organization including the Public Service of Canada lay awake at night trying to figure out how they can get around whatever particular obstacles are in their path and make a few more bucks.

If we were to look at it we would see that the only people who are really suffering a wage freeze are the people who are on the bottom rung of the ladder in the public service because they cannot reclassify their jobs.

For example, right here on Parliament Hill employees of the lowest order of employment had to restructure their employment base, come in on weekends and change things around so that they could no longer make overtime because there was no more overtime. They cannot come in and work on a weekend and get paid overtime. Yet other people in the hierarchy here have reclassified their jobs so that they can then get an increase by reclassification.

• (1800)

Another example that was brought to my attention during the recess was in the weather stations across the nation. A person from the public service brought to my attention the fact that we have replaced weather recorders who used to be paid in the region of \$30,000 with a machine that costs about \$250,000.

These machines have a life of about five years and require one person to maintain them and travel around. Bonuses are paid in the public service for anyone who is able to reduce the person years of employment in their sphere of influence. What happens is that if one gets rid of five weather observers and replace them with a machine, one would get the bonus for reducing one's payroll. However, the expense of the five machines goes to one ledger and the expense of the maintenance person goes on another ledger. We still have to pay it but we are really no better off than we were when we started or perhaps a little further away from where we wanted to be.

It also does not do any good in terms of employment. What we have to do as a country is not just say we are going to have a wage freeze, but we have to go through our books line by line just as we would in the private sector and ask how we can make

everything that we do more effective, more efficient and work better rather than just saying willy-nilly, we are going to put a freeze on this or we are going to put a freeze on that. While it sounds good, it really does not accomplish anything.

In conclusion, I would like to spend just a couple of minutes addressing the question of Quebec and the fact that this has come up for those who have been following this debate. Every time a member of the Bloc stands in this House, at least in my experience, it has been to cry how badly off the Bloc is treated financially by the rest of Canada and yet it is to request more money from the Government of Canada.

I hope that when this great national debate takes place in this House and in the rest of the country we talk honestly and openly and fairly about who gets what out of Confederation. Speaking for myself and for many of my colleagues here, speaking for the people I represent in Edmonton Southwest we do not mind because we recognize that we are better off than most paying money into Canada that is used as equalization going to other regions of Canada to help them along.

However, we really resent it when we are paying this money into an equalization pool and the people who are on the receiving end of it just ask for more and never say thanks. As this debate over the next few months unfolds, I hope we will talk honestly about whether we are together as a nation because we want to be together or because we are together as a nation only because we continually pull out the wallet and throw money at the problem. I can guarantee that if that is the only reason that we are together as a nation it will not last.

This budget in some aspects is a step in the right direction. Certainly to be fair it is better than anything the Conservative government came up with over many years. Let us not kid ourselves, it is merely the first tentative step. The very difficult and hard decisions are yet to come. They must come because not one person here, not one Canadian anywhere in this land has ever spent their way into prosperity.

The only way that we as a nation can make our futures better is if we live within our means. It is not morally right for our generation or the generation that preceded ours to live beyond our means at the expense of generations of Canadians yet unborn. We are going to have to bite the bullet, live within our means and make the tough decisions necessary.

• (1805)

Mrs. Beryl Gaffney (Nepean): Mr. Speaker, at the outset I thought that the member from the Reform Party was going to be talking about the CBC. He started talking about the CBC in his initial comments and started quoting on the program that we could watch with great anticipation and delight this evening.