

*The Budget—Mr. Hnatyshyn**[Translation]*

These measures are in addition to the many regulatory reform initiatives already implemented or about to be implemented under the direction of Ministers with a central responsibility for regulation. These Ministers will provide details on their reform activities as work progresses. Although I am responsible for developing and implementing the overall strategy of regulatory reform, I think I should stress the crucial role played by the Ministers in this process within their respective responsibility sectors.

[English]

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, it should be clear that we are not talking about a one-shot crack at regulatory reform. Rather, we are launching an across-the-board series of initiatives which we expect will pick up increasing momentum and become one of the Government's most substantial achievements.

You will recall, Mr. Speaker, that the Government's regulatory policy makes clear that the Government is committed to a program of pragmatic and balanced regulatory reform. Its aim is to make federal regulations smarter in terms of efficiency, and fairer in terms of public access and participation. The regulatory program improvement package being released today reflects this pragmatic and balanced approach to regulatory reform.

While time does not permit me to go into all 43 of the items included in this package, perhaps I can give you some of the flavour by referring to a few of the specific items. The ministerial task force found that there are a number of federal, as well as provincial, regulatory programs touching on different aspects of hazardous products. It queried whether the net protection provided to Canadians by these programs is adequate. In response, the Government has decided to evaluate a re-ordering of priorities and the possible elimination of fragmented responsibilities in these areas.

Several of the items in the package call for increased privatization, cost recovery, or increased self-regulation as means of reducing unnecessary Government intervention or regulatory costs. As an example, an action plan is to be prepared for the phased and full devolution over six years to the private sector of electricity and gas verification.

The package identifies a number of statutes, such as the Bankruptcy Act and Copyright Act, which are seriously out of date and deficient. These laws provide the crucial regulatory framework within which our economy operates. If these laws are flawed, our economy suffers a serious disadvantage. The Government intends to give priority to reforming these laws. Several of the items in the package relate to areas of parallel, and sometimes overlapping, federal-provincial regulatory activity. An example of this is the item calling for early action to arrive at more satisfactory compliance and enforcement policies for Section 33 of the Fisheries Act governing water and fish habitat.

Finally, Hon. Members will no doubt be interested to note that the reform package includes a number of improvements

affecting food regulation and inspection. The decision in this respect are typical of the Government's general approach to regulatory reform with the emphasis on making things work better in the interests of economic development, job creation, public protection, and more efficient Government. In keeping with these priorities we are introducing today several practical reforms intended to strengthen still further Canada's worldwide reputation for excellence in food production. The reforms represent a major advantage in the efficiency and effectiveness of our regulation of food products. They boil down to four main thrusts.

First, we are going to strengthen the protection of Canadians by reaffirming the absolute primacy of the Department of National Health and Welfare on all matters affecting the health, safety, or nutritional dimensions of the food industry. Second, we are going to eliminate duplication and inconsistency among regulations dealing with health and safety issues on the one hand, and quality and grading issues on the other. Third, we are going to try to intensify efforts to co-operate with the provinces to bring about common health and safety standards across the country. Fourth, the Government is going to adopt a policy of no ministerial discretion with regard to individual inspection judgments.

I have gone into some detail on the food regulation reforms contained in the program improvement package because I think they are an excellent illustration of how the Government intends to proceed with regulatory reform in general. We have no intention of throwing the baby out with the bath water, but confronted by a need for regulatory improvement we intend to take firm, forthright, and effective action. With these food regulation reforms we have preserved the good while confronting the problems and, I trust, overcoming them.

The February 26 Budget makes it clear that the Government intends to face up to the problems of fiscal instability with statemanship and determination. In the same way, the regulatory reform strategy is directed at getting the country's regulatory affairs in order. By responsible spending and a strategy for fair and better regulation, the Government has already begun the monumental process of turning the country's economy away from pessimism and decline and toward energetic renewal and prosperity for the future.

Mr. Kaplan: Mr. Speaker, I wondered whether I was listening to the budget debate because, within the latitude permitted, the Minister spent much time talking about ministerial responsibilities outside the Budget. Is it because he is not prepared to defend the Budget that he spent so much of his time trying to divert the attention of the Canadian people from all of the things that are wrong with it? As a result of his silence on this subject, can we expect that the Government is proposing to take our advice and make some of the changes in the Budget that we have been asking for?

• (1130)

Mr. Hnatyshyn: As you know, Mr. Speaker, I am the last one to indulge in partisan repartee across the aisle, especially in connection with observations made by my distinguished