

Federal Transfers to Provinces

West (Mr. Weatherhead) was there; he was on the Liberal team.

That team unanimously made a number of recommendations. I wonder how the member for Scarborough West is going to vote on this bill. I remember time after time in the committee meetings across Canada he boasted about the fact that his daughter was at Queen's University. He told students there would be no reduction in post-secondary education transfers. I wonder how that member is going to vote when this issue comes up. I wonder if he is going to vote the same way as he did with respect to the budget, after his comments concerning the budget.

I wonder also how the hon. member for Gloucester will vote. He so proudly talked about his alumni from his alma mater, the University of Moncton. I wonder how he is going to vote when he sees these transfers reduced for post-secondary education.

I really wonder how the hon. members for Vaudreuil and Verchères will vote. They were so proud of the Quebec medicare system. They said that the doctors in Quebec cannot send an extra bill. They said that medicare is free in Quebec and doctors are not entitled to overbill or opt out, and if they do, their patients do not get paid, the additional fees. Oh no, that cannot happen. That is the kind of report that was presented and they stood behind medicare there. They were proud of their system; they were proud of the fact that the province of Quebec, alone among the provinces in Canada, spends more money on post-secondary education, proportionately, than any other province. I am sure they are going to be able to stand up and vote according to their conscience, and according to the way they voted in committee. That is their obligation; their obligation is to point out to the Minister of Finance where he has gone wrong. Somewhere along the line they have an obligation to their colleagues in the committee to stand up for the report of the committee.

We all signed the report, Mr. Speaker. I will quote two paragraphs from that report. In Chapter X, on page 193, we said:

We hope that the general message of this long and complex report is clear, however. We are agreed that the programs examined in the course of our work are serving vital social needs and merit undiminished support. Over-all funding of these programs should, in our view, be maintained at no less than current levels. In our appraisal of the programs falling within our order of reference, we identified none in which reductions in over-all levels of funding could be undertaken without a serious risk that important program goals and standards would be jeopardized.

We are all agreed, therefore, that federal-provincial negotiations should be directed toward the goal of undiminished funding for both the health and post-secondary sectors supported through EPF and the social security programs financed in part through CAP.

Down further on that same page we say:

It is our view that there is now, for the most part, no fat left in the system—no fat in post-secondary education, no fat in the health system, no excess spending in social assistance, little redundancy in social services. We accept the representations of those who argued before the task force that serious cuts in program funding would cut into muscle and sinew, not fat. Unless one could presume that federal reductions in funding would automatically be matched by corresponding increases in provincial expenditures—a presumption that may not be considered altogether plausible—then in order to maintain present standards, programs would have to be privately financed to a greater extent than at present. In health, this would mean greater appeal to user charges and more extra-billing; in

education, higher fees. In either case, basic national objectives of equity and equality of access would suffer.

This country is going to see the basic qualities of equity and accessibility suffer. We are going to have higher student fees, we are going to have increased provincial taxes. This business of restraint is a transfer of a federal expense to a provincial expense. It would be different if the federal take of taxes in the country were going down, but it is not, it is going up. It is going up by 13.5 per cent. So we are going to have the provinces forced to add in something. We will wind up with people paying for going to operating rooms or for using emergency centres in hospitals. We will wind up with doctors having extra billing and maybe a two-level medicare system.

There is no rationalization here, Mr. Speaker. It may be that our country is not doing as well as it once did. It may be that we are not as affluent as we once were. It may be that we have to restrain ourselves. It may be that the government must cut back on expenditures. But to the public out there, there is no apparent cutback in expense. Our salaries were not cut back, nor was the cost of running the House of Commons, the foreign aid bill or the salaries of senior civil servants. What was cut back was what the public wanted, what people demanded. I read briefly from the representation made to the task force by the Canadian Medical Association:

● (1710)

The delivery of health care has become interwoven with the fabric of government and intergovernmental financing arrangements. The people of Canada invariably rate health care insurance—medicare—as the most valuable, most appreciated service provided by government. We believe that the public ascribe that connotation to government in the generic sense of the word, not specifically related to either the federal or provincial government.

What we have, then, is a cutting back of that which the federal government somehow does not control, and spending, spending, spending on that which the federal government does control. The time has come when this budget, with these arrangements made in the budget and since negotiated in this bill, should be set aside for perhaps a year or two so that we can reorient our priorities.

I am not saying that we do not need to cut back. As a country we cannot go on spending as though we were earning. We could be earning if we were properly directed, represented and organized financially, but we cannot go on in a willy-nilly fashion. We must set aside this cutback on post-secondary education and health care transfers and analyse where these cutbacks fit in with other things that should be cut back.

Ask somebody whether he would like an increase in the CBC budget and a decrease in the medicare budget. Ask somebody if he would like to see \$141 million more go to a CIDA project for foreign aid while at the same time having his kids pay a great deal more for university tuition or not ensuring that the books are in the library and that the university is able to work well. Ask Canadians what their priorities are.

Let us remove those provisions from the bill and go ahead with the equalization arrangements. Let us go ahead with the