

Government Orders

to point out that the purpose of the new air transportation tax regime is to reduce the cost of short haul flights.

This was brought to our attention by a witness from the province of Quebec and also raised in the House during debate yesterday by members from Quebec. I want to reiterate that in most cases those flights will see a reduction in the cost of the air transportation tax because they qualify as short haul flights.

It is very important that there be flexibility of the government to respond to the needs of businessmen and local markets. The member opposite raised this and I agree with him 100 per cent. For small businesses the cost of these flights is very important. It slows down their business in the province. It slows down the business across western Canada. We have made efforts through this to reduce the cost of the airport tax on short haul flights and to increase it on long haul flights. We feel that brings a greater degree of fairness.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on for a while about other comments made in the House but I welcome the debate, as do you, and I urge all members to support Bill C-32 as soon as possible.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): It being 5.30 p.m. the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

Mr. Milliken: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. I think you might find there is unanimous consent of the House to suspend the operation of private members' hour for the time being to permit completion of the debate on Bill C-32.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Agreed. Resuming debate on Bill C-32.

Mr. Dale Johnston (Wetaskiwin): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak on Bill C-32 on behalf of the Reform Party. Other members of my party had planned and prepared to make presentations on this as well but unfortunately they will not have the same opportunity as I have.

Last night we witnessed a Liberal interpretation of open democracy when they invoked closure on this and every other critical piece of legislation before this House.

Here we have another omnibus bill that tackles issues as varied as airport tax, meal allowance changes and the anti-smuggling initiatives. Today I will concentrate my remarks on the cigarette smuggling and taxation component of this bill. I believe that this is a step in the right direction. We should be educating the public about the hazard of smoking tobacco. I agree with the export tax on tobacco products.

We in this party are in favour of stronger enforcement of the laws against smuggling. We have a police force in Canada that is one of the best in the world. We have laws. Why this situation is so different from any other law breaker is really difficult for me to understand. Take speeders for example. Because people do not comply with the speeding laws is no reason to change the laws to do away with the speed limit so that people can drive at any rate they like. Instead we come up with different ways to apprehend these speeders and we penalize them for having no respect for our laws.

When we talk about compliance we have a problem now with smuggling east and west in Canada. It occurs to me that we are all too ready to enforce our smuggling laws east and west but we are very hesitant to do the same as far as other smuggling is concerned.

How much money do you suppose this government is foregoing with this new policy of the reduction of taxation?

• (1735)

The government's policy is to broaden the tax base. It has voluntarily given up hundreds of millions of dollars of revenue. If one reduces taxes on cigarettes across this country and foregoes those hundreds of millions of dollars worth of revenue, it would seem to me that in order for the Liberal government to reach its target of 3 per cent deficit of the GDP in three years' time, it will be compelled to make up this revenue somewhere else since it seems reticent to reduce its spending by any substantial amount.

I suspect that there have been many debates in this House and in the provincial legislatures that increasing taxes would not only bring in additional revenue from the so-called sin taxes but it would also be a financial deterrent against smoking. This reduction in the taxation on cigarettes seems to be a complete departure from that rationale.

This bill also increases the legal age limit to buy tobacco which I suppose is commendable but at the same time the government is making tobacco and cigarettes more affordable. Now that we are making it financially easier for people to purchase cigarettes, will we see an increase in the usage of an already overburdened health care system? Some members have quoted facts and figures on both sides, whether there is an increase in smoking or whether there has actually been a decrease in smoking.

It makes me wonder when we are quoting facts from Statistics Canada if they have taken into consideration the amount of cigarettes that have been smuggled into this country and summed that do not show up on StatsCan's statistics.