

Government Orders

The third principle, the meaning of social needs should be personalized, privatized and decentralized so that individual families, communities and lower levels of government, not the federal government, are the primary actors. The best way to determine and respond to real needs is through empowerment at the personal family and community level. Big programs managed by central governments are enormously inefficient at getting the right help to the right people at the right time, enormously wasteful of taxpayers' resources and generosity.

Shared jurisdictions and shared cost programs must be eliminated. They lessen accountability for results, reduce the incentive to be cost efficient, breed bureaucracy, reduce flexibility and inhibit the application of common sense.

The patchwork of overlapping rigid bureaucratic social programs must evolve toward a single access point, enabling people in need to seek assistance through the empowerment of individuals and community oriented caseworkers. The empowerment of individuals and families is to be particularly encouraged because such empowerment reduces dependence on the state.

The distribution of federal transfers in support of education through vouchers is to be encouraged because it empowers individuals. The strengthening of families through more generous tax credits for the support of children is to be encouraged because the family is better able to meet the needs of children than any government. The single biggest cause of child poverty is family breakdown. To reduce child poverty, strengthen the family.

The delivery of social services by the level of government closest to the people and most responsive to the people, most accountable to the people, is to be encouraged. This requires recognition by the federal government that it is not now, nor has it ever been, nor will it ever be, the government closest to the people.

• (1215)

The minister said in his statement earlier today that he has a commitment to decentralization. It is to be believed because it is written down in this green paper. The two pages he mentioned incidentally are dividing pages, just dividers.

Why should the provinces or anyone believe that assertion of commitment to decentralization because it is written in this paper when it is written in the Constitution of Canada that the responsibility for health, education and social assistance belongs to the provinces? That has not deterred the federal government from involving itself in centralizing programs in those areas through the use of its spending power.

If the government were really serious about decentralizing social programs, empowering individuals and freeing them from the iron grip of bureaucracy, it would have included specific options for turning over more responsibility, not just entering into administrative arrangements, for program delivery to communities, private organizations, and other levels of government.

I might add that in no area is the unwillingness of the federal government to decentralize power more evident than in the field of health care which is not even discussed in this paper. The total health care bill for Canada last year was \$70 billion. Of that total 48 per cent was picked up by the provinces and local governments, 28 per cent by individuals and by private insurance companies, and less than 24 per cent by the federal government. Yet it is the federal government that presumes to dictate the terms of service and financing in the health care field for all other players, a position which prevents rather than facilitates genuine health care reform.

The federal government professes to be just a partner in health care. In reality it has become a junior, junior partner. But it always acts like the senior partner which is why the provinces and the public are so sceptical about government's professed interest in new partnership arrangements.

In conclusion I want to spend a couple of moments on getting to the root of the problem in social reform. I challenge the minister to reveal to the House the real reason he has presented a discussion paper rather than an action plan.

The reason is that he has been unable to reach substantive agreement with the provinces, the governments to which the Constitution assigns primary responsibility for health, education and welfare, the governments without whose support and co-operation meaningful social reform is impossible.

I challenge the minister to reveal to the House the real reason he has been unable to get the co-operation of the provinces in a substantive way. The reason is that his government is committed to status quo federalism, that his government and his leader are not committed to a rapid and substantive decentralization of power, particularly in the areas of health, education, social assistance and social insurance.

Until the federal government does become committed to such a decentralization, most of which can be done within the existing Constitution, I predict that status quo federalism will lead to nothing but the perpetuation of an unacceptable status quo with respect to Canada's social safety net.

Who will lose? It will not be the political elite and the special interests that support and feed off the current centralized system, but the young, the old, the sick, the poor, the unemployed, the taxpayers of today and the taxpayers of tomorrow.