

The Address

For example, our Reform group does not intend to conduct itself as a traditional opposition party. We feel ourselves bound to rigorously scrutinize everything that the government puts forward but we do not consider ourselves bound to oppose everything that the government puts forward.

In scrutinizing the speech from the throne we will seek to identify and give credit to the measures we consider good. We will also seek to identify and expose those measures that we consider weak or ill-advised but when we do the latter we will feel an obligation not simply to criticize or oppose but to offer constructive alternatives.

We think of this House, which is beyond precedent, as a three-cornered House. There is the government, the Official Opposition whose members wish to take their province out of Canada, and Her Majesty's constructive alternative.

In keeping with this positioning, our principal contribution to the throne speech debate will be threefold. We will analyse the government's program from a variety of perspectives: fiscal, economic and social. We will offer proposals for improving the government's legislative program in the interests of all Canadians and we will put forward a subamendment designed to improve the government's program. The passage of our subamendment should not be viewed as an expression of non-confidence but as a constructive addition which government members themselves could support.

Allow me then to speak for just a moment on the most commendable feature of the speech from the throne, its greatest weakness and a proposed improvement.

• (1710)

We believe that the most commendable feature of the speech from the throne is its promise to enhance the credibility of Parliament. However the objective of any parliamentary reform in our judgment should be to create a freer Parliament, not just a more efficient one, a Parliament where members are free to express and vote the positions of their constituents even when it conflicts with party lines.

Parliamentary reform of course, including this type of reform, has been promised before. Hopefully this government intends to act on its promises. The public is tired of the hollow eloquence of words and longs for the eloquence of deeds.

For example, nothing would enhance the credibility of Parliament more than the institution of genuinely free votes. What we and many Canadians would like to see is for the Prime Minister to rise in his place today or tomorrow and clearly declare to you, Mr. Speaker, the following policy as a policy of his government: That the government will not consider the defeat of a government motion, including a spending measure, to constitute an expression of non-confidence in the government unless it is

immediately followed by the passage of a formal non-confidence vote.

That takes about 30 seconds to say. I say to the Prime Minister if he were to do that he would be known as the liberator of Parliament no matter what.

We hope over time that this House and even the media will come to see cross-over voting, the number of times that a member crosses over party lines in the interest of constituents, not as a sign of party weakness or dissension but as a sign of the strength of genuine democracy in this Chamber.

At the beginning of this session we want to commend the government's commitment as contained in the speech from the throne to enhance the credibility of Parliament. We think that is one of the strongest features of its program if it follows through on it.

Allow me to turn to the greatest weakness of the government's legislative program and the area that we feel is most in need of improvement. All members are aware of the fiscal legacy which the previous Conservative administration left to the people of Canada and to the 35th Parliament. The distinguishing features of that legacy are, and this is the bottom line of the fiscal regime of the government that preceded this government, a record federal deficit for 1992-93 of \$40.5 billion and a total federal debt as of noon yesterday of \$500 billion.

I say to hon. members that the greatest challenge facing this Parliament, whether their commitments are constitutional, social or to jobs, is to control federal overspending. I frankly expected that challenge to be acknowledged and addressed more forcefully and directly in the government's legislative program, not just in a budget two or three months hence.

Traditional throne speeches, and this speech is very traditional, always listed things that governments proposed to do. However the throne speech of a government that is \$500 billion in debt ought to contain a new section listing the things that government proposes to stop doing. This speech contains no such section. Perhaps the Minister of Finance was not given equal time in its preparation. It would be vastly improved if it did and if it included such items as the following: a specific commitment to stop the payment of premature and excessive pensions to parliamentarians; a commitment to stop subsidizing crown corporations to the tune of \$6 billion per year accompanied by a schedule for the gradual elimination of such subsidies; a commitment to reduce non-salary overheads of government departments and agencies by at least 15 per cent; a commitment to stop paying OAS and other income transfers to high income households; a commitment to stop regional development programs that simply do not work; and a commitment to identify and eliminate all unnecessary government functions.