

The Address

ensure that the poor will not have to suffer from changes made for fiscal consolidation purposes.

This is why, as some of my colleagues have pointed out, we are adamant that the government must set up a House committee whose mandate will be to review each budget item in order to eliminate unnecessary and frivolous expenses.

• (2100)

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, in order to protect the health of Quebecers and Canadians, the government must guarantee to all the provinces that they will get their fair share of the money paid by taxpayers to this end, as well as the all services which Quebecers and Canadians desperately need.

The Official Opposition intends to intervene in a useful way and, if necessary, as energetically as required, to ensure that each citizen of Quebec and Canada has access to the health care and services which they need.

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I must congratulate the hon. member for Drummond on her maiden speech to the House. It is obvious that she has some interesting ideas.

First of all, I have a comment. I think she should put some questions about the issues raised in her speech to her leader, since he was a member of the former federal government and, as she well knows, that government was responsible for almost all of the cuts that were made and for causing serious hardship to people across Canada. Her leader often supported this government in the House, as did many of his colleagues. I think she should be putting the questions about the problems the country is now experiencing to him, not to this government.

I believe the hon. member also broached the subject of the tax on tobacco products. What course of action does she advocate? Would she prefer to see the tax remain in place, along with the associated loss of revenues, or would she prefer that it be replaced with another tax? The former government tried something else. It imposed an export tax on cigarettes. Obviously there were some problems with this decision because the government later suspended the tax. What would the hon. member have the government do now? Impose a new tax, suspend the tax altogether or what? She was not very specific. I would like to hear her answer.

Mrs. Picard: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague on the other side for his remarks. What the Bloc Quebecois is calling for is the removal or elimination of federal taxes on cigarettes. The black market is thriving and this is the only way to curb the illegal activities now taking place.

[English]

Mr. Wayne Easter (Malpeque): Mr. Speaker, I want to agree with the hon. member's comment that the social economic condition is extremely important to health care. The Minister of Human Resources Development is certainly looking at ways of

improving the social safety net and making better use of every dollar spent.

The hon. member made a comment that I am intrigued and curious about. It was along the lines that a return trip to Ottawa is at a cost, I think implying that the trips of MPs and others coming to Ottawa that you leave dollars here and it is a drain.

• (2105)

The perception is that Ottawa is English Canada and it is a drain on all the taxpayers of Canada. Now I am not a lover of the bureaucracy by any means, I am a critic of it and we have to make improvements there.

However has the hon. member given any thought or does she know the economic spinoff in terms of the central government's efforts, Parliament and all the ministries, that go to Hull as a result? What would the losses be to Hull and to the province of Quebec if the Bloc ever got its desire to separate Quebec from Canada?

[Translation]

Mrs. Picard: Mr. Speaker, I want to tell the hon. member that he did not understand me at all when I referred to the return trip taken by taxpayers' money. As you know, health care is paid for by taxpayers, by the provinces, including Quebec. Taxpayers send money to pay the federal government for health care. The federal government administers and manages; the department of health administers and provides health care to pay for medicare. But the federal government does not do a favour to taxpayers. Taxpayers pay their share. What I am saying is that when the money which comes from the provinces, from the taxpayers, goes to the provinces who then send on here the taxes paid by people for these services, it costs a lot of money to administer. The federal government takes its share, it takes its money, and then gives some back to the provinces so that they can administer their health programs.

And it is this administration by the federal government which costs a lot of money. If each province was in charge, and if taxpayers gave their money to the province, which would manage its own health care program, it would be cheaper and hospitals would not have a deficit such as is the case right now. That is what I wanted to say.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start with a comment on the presentation made by the hon. member for Drummond who is to be commended for her excellent speech.

First of all, I entirely approve of her proposal that the provinces should themselves raise, and be allowed to keep, the amounts they need to operate the health care system. However, as we know, under the present system this is unthinkable. So we must ensure that transfer payments to the provinces are not affected, so that the provinces can continue to be responsible for and provide health care services to their residents. I may remind hon. members opposite that during the election campaign, the Prime Minister promised that he would not tamper with transfer payments to the provinces.