

The Budget

I think it was a choice the government had to make and a choice voters made in the two last elections. It came as no surprise to anyone when we said we wanted to reduce the deficit. It came as no surprise when we said we would have to make certain adjustments in a number of departments and programs so that would be able to live within our means.

I suggest that if we continue to compare the records of both governments on the way they handled public spending since the other side is so critical, perhaps we should look at the operating balance which is extremely important. In 1984 under the Liberal government the cost of programs, before interest charges, was \$16 billion more than our revenues. This means that on top of having a budget and reaching into the pockets of taxpayers, the government in its estimates was spending \$16 billion more than what it was to take in, and that is not counting the debt service. In other words, we were quickly getting deeper and deeper into debt.

We had an operating surplus of \$10 billion last year and that means a turnaround of \$26 billion. We went from an operating deficit to an operating surplus, notwithstanding the debt. That is extremely important. It is a sign that the government is really controlling the expenditures of this country. If the trend persists, if we keep to our goal of restraining expenditures, of controlling the increase in expenditures, we will have more room to manoeuvre in the areas of social programs and economic development.

Today, in 1992, Canadians cannot believe that a government is a serious or responsible one if it says: "Forget the deficit; we don't have to take it into account. Regardless of the deficit, if I were in office I would create new health programs, new industrial growth programs; if I were in office I would offer this incentive or that one". I feel that a responsible government must give an exact picture to the people. In recent years our government has succeeded to a great extent in straightening up the public spending in a satisfactory, if not very popular, fashion.

I think the budget tabled by the Minister of Finance is an excellent budget for the people of Quebec, considering that the 4.7 million taxpayers in Quebec will benefit from the cut in the personal income surtax. Let us not

forget that we will also simplify, streamline and enrich our support for the 2.9 million families and 2.3 million children in Quebec. Nationally total child benefits will increase by \$400 million per year.

One of the most important aspects of this budget was pointed out when the Minister of Finance recognized that common-law couples and married couples were not treated equally under the tax system. This measure is in response to strong pressure put on all members of this House and addresses at the same time an injustice which unfortunately continued over the years and had to be redressed.

There was also the home buyers' plan through which we are encouraging individuals to boost the economy by allowing them to use their RRSPs to purchase homes. This will be most beneficial for some.

Members opposite keep asking us what we are doing to boost the Canadian economy. We will reduce the tax burden of the 11,000 Quebec companies in the manufacturing and processing sectors. We will also take measures to help small business and farmers. We will increase the capital cost allowance rate for these businesses.

While this budget as a whole may be moderate, it is very important in order to boost the economy and to ensure that the confidence of the Canadian people in their government is maintained. This budget is especially important because budgets such as this one allow us not to mortgage our future but rather to prepare for it with enough flexibility to set up adequate programs.

That is what is important, and that is why I strongly support this budget.

[English]

Mr. Jim Edwards (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture)): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to participate in the budget debate of 1992.

I, have found this budget to be a sensible, tough, consistent, creative and fairer than many previous budgets. I propose in the limited time available to me to address those characteristics, to suggest where a future budget might make some improvements, and to review what is contained in this budget for Albertans and what Albertans are saying about the budget itself.