

The Address

• (1625)

If the federal government wants to give good, solid proof that it will have no involvement whatsoever in this program, why not just give the provinces the money they were promised?

Madam Speaker, the federal government also keeps saying that the infrastructure program will stimulate job creation and boost the economy in Quebec and Canada.

By making this program the focus of their economic recovery policy, the government is displaying a glaring lack of vision and sensitivity to the real, basic needs for improving the economic performance of the provinces and Canada as a whole.

How could the Liberal Party think that such an ad hoc program could have a structuring effect on the economy while a more serious and carefully thought-out approach would have had a much stronger structuring effect by creating steadier employment?

I am thinking for instance of the HST project which is particularly promising both in terms of development for the economy of Quebec and Canada and in terms of industrial consolidation in high-tech sectors.

Another strategy which would have had a structuring effect for the consolidation of the industrial fabric in Quebec and Canada would have been to develop a national defence industry reconversion program. In these industries, production is already technology intensive and for the federal government to provide them with assistance through a reconversion program would have demonstrated a more structuring view toward brightening things up as regards the economy and the manufacturing industry.

I would be remiss to address the issue of infrastructure without mentioning the need for oneness in light of the recent negotiations between the federal government and the provinces.

Over the past few weeks, I have had to tell constituents who were enquiring about the state of the negotiations on infrastructure that the government was keeping us in the dark.

These hidden negotiations have led to confusion for which the federal government must assume responsibility. The umbrella agreements being drawn for each province—and we will revisit the issue after the Minister tables these agreements—contains grey areas on aspects as simple as the definition of infrastructure.

In fact, what constitutes an infrastructure? For some, infrastructure must be narrowly interpreted in terms of roads, sewers, drainage ditches and sidewalks. That is how this basic infrastructure project was defined. Others favour a wide and vague definition including cultural and community facilities, telecommunication highways, even congress centres.

This wider definition suggests that the moneys to finance this infrastructure could come from various government departments such as Public Works or federal regional development offices.

The nature of the projects chosen under the infrastructure program could not only confuse existing federal departments but also lead to a duplication of departmental efforts and to a waste of public funds.

In this regard it is conceivable that the federal government will be tempted to use the money already allocated to these departments, thus weakening the notion of new money invested by the Canadian government.

The Liberal Party cannot use old money to keep its election promises, or else its program amounts to a mere accounting exercise.

In fact, is the federal government willing to pay the grants in lieu of taxes in full to municipalities?

According to the UMRCQ, the Union of Quebec County Regional Municipalities, these grants amount to some \$125 million. How much is it for all the provinces?

It is also easy to assume that the government will be tempted to reduce public spending in terms of transfer payments to the provinces and social programs.

• (1630)

The Bloc Québécois denounces such practices, because the budget cuts to be made in the federal government must not be at the expense of the poorest people.

Together with my colleagues in the Bloc Québécois, again I invite the government to set up as quickly as possible a committee to review public finances. This committee could identify major cuts that would provide the funds required to support needy people.

Finally, Madam Speaker, the infrastructure program must not be used to reward the government's friends. The government must not intervene in the process of recommending and selecting applications for financial support under the program.

When we met with the minister on January 12, 1994, I proposed consulting all members of the House who are directly concerned with local projects, regardless of their political affiliation.

I also wrote to the minister on January 17, so that he could explain this point which was missing from the document received by all members as of Friday, January 14.

So I am satisfied, I admit, that the minister took this recommendation into account in his address on the Speech from the Throne on January 21.