

The Deputy Speaker: Shall all questions stand?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker I wish to inform the House that in view of the ministerial statement, the time allotted to government orders will be extended 16 minutes, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2)(b).

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 1994

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Deputy Speaker: I should mention that the hon. member for Mercier told me that she had to leave and that she had completed her remarks. I must point out to the members of the Official Opposition that the amendment moved by the member for Mercier is in order and there is no procedural problem. In short, the amendment is acceptable.

[English]

Mr. Stephen Harper (Calgary West): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on Bill C-17, the omnibus bill on the implementation of a number of measures in the recent budget. I am doing so on behalf of the hon. member for Lethbridge who is unable to be here. He has asked me to make a few comments on the general orientation of our caucus toward the bill and some of the measures in it. I will also take some time to comment further to that on some of our specific concerns with regard to the sections on transfer payments to the provinces, the area for which I am specifically responsible in the bill.

• (1230)

Before doing so I would like to take a moment to draw to the attention of the House that Ernest Manning High School in the south part of my constituency of Calgary West has been holding a model parliament this week where they are debating many of the same things. I had been scheduled to attend their model parliament today but due to this commitment and other commitments particularly with regard to Bill C-18 and the committee hearings we had last night, I was unable to depart Ottawa.

I have had the honour on many occasions in the past to attend model parliaments at Ernest Manning High School. If my experience is any example, I am sure the students would have much to recommend to the House in terms of not only the informed level of debate but also the democratic procedures that are in place in that particular parliament.

Having said that, let me move to Bill C-17. As I indicated in earlier remarks today when we were discussing a point of procedural order, our party would be opposed to this kind of measure, to an omnibus approach to government legislation. In

Government Orders

my remarks today, specifically to start with, I will deal with the five general parts of the bill: part I which applies to public sector compensation considerations; part II, the cuts in the Canada Assistance Plan and PUITTA transfers; part III, the reductions in transportation subsidies of various kinds; part IV, the authorization of borrowing authority for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation; and finally part V, the significant changes to unemployment insurance.

Our party has mixed views on these various items. It is unfortunate that the nature of the legislation itself would not allow us to independently support some of the more desirable aspects of the bill, at least at the voting phases.

In part I, public sector compensation, the effect of the measure as in the budget is to extend wage freezes that have been in place now to the end of 1997, saving the government up to \$1.5 billion over the next three years. In the zero in three deficit reduction program Reformers ran on during the election, we supported general reductions to the costs of the federal bureaucracy, the civil service, and to some degree civil service compensation, although certainly we would prefer to see most of the savings in the public sector concentrated on non-wage overheads.

However it has been our experience that in the private sector—and, as members know, my area in particular is dominated by private sector activity—a general lack of raises in private sector wages has been the norm for several years now and downsizing in many organizations has been commonplace. In comparison, the public sector has been relatively lightly affected by the ongoing recessionary problems that we believe ultimately originate in the public sector through not only the expenditure practices of governments but also their taxation policies and taxation responses to deficit situations.

Public sector compensation has continued to remain generous during this period and downsizing relatively light compared to that experienced in many other areas of our society. It is only justified that the public sector would experience these kinds of wage freezes during the period in question.

• (1235)

I hope the committee will examine some of the specific measures and some of the broadness of the wage freezes which are actually very rigid across categories and do occasionally lead to some inequities or incongruities in application. There may be some specific things the committee could do to examine, while not violating the principle of freezing the overall wage bill, whether any more flexibility could be given.

We also would like to support the one-time adjustments involved in government policy for relocation and incentive payments to workers who are being displaced from the public sector, particularly in the military area. There may be disagreement with the specific programs proposed, but I think no one questions the principle that there is a need to provide interim relief to those affected by government cutbacks. In particular we compliment the government for beginning to encourage the use of these funds toward retraining and relocation rather than just