

[English]

THE BUDGET

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the finance minister said it would be fruitless for Reformers to ask questions about the budget because he would not under any circumstances get into specifics. Yet representatives of the financial institutions seem to be learning a great deal about the budget from off the record conversations with government insiders. For example, Sherry Cooper, chief economist of Nesbitt Burns says that those in the know tell her the government will save \$5.25 billion in spending reductions next year and \$7 billion in 1996-97.

Will the minister provide the House with the list of institutions and others who have been provided with this type of information about the forthcoming budget and will he explain why he is not willing to provide the same details to this House and the Canadian people?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the leader of the third party that no such information has been provided to any financial institutions and therefore he has his answer.

I did participate in a telephone conference call with Sherry Cooper along with 50 or 60 others, including a full representation from the financial press.

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I can understand why the finance minister wants to try to con the markets and outline his budget strategy to financial analysts. They are uncertain and worried about the government's fiscal direction. The Canadian people are also uncertain and worried about the government's fiscal direction and they need some reassurances.

• (1425)

How is it that the government can find ways to reassure financial analysts on the size of the budget deficit and spending cuts, but will not tell the Canadian people anything about pending tax increases? Why the double standard? It is their money.

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been able to reassure financial markets because we have been able to say that this year, as the Prime Minister has said, for the first time in a long, long time the Canadian government is going to hit its deficit targets. We have also been able to reassure financial markets because we have said that in the years to come we are going to continue to hit those targets.

Oral Questions

We have been able to reassure the Canadian people and those who are in need when we have said that we will not engage in the kind of fiscal savagery recommended by the Reform Party.

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, if you set your targets low enough, even the Conservatives can hit them.

The government seems to be finding ways of getting information to the money markets about the budget in order to prepare their reaction and calm their fears, but it is unprepared to provide the same information to this House and the Canadian people who have an even greater stake in the budget.

I am wondering whether the Prime Minister condones this double standard or whether he is willing to be as frank with the Canadian people as his finance minister is apparently willing to be frank with financial analysts.

Is the Prime Minister willing to tell the Canadian people today, yes or no, whether the government intends to increase taxes in the forthcoming budget? Be as frank with them as the minister is with the analysts.

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, you will have to be patient because we will be asked that question every day until the day of the budget. Everybody knows we cannot reveal the contents of the budget before budget night. We will respect the rule that has existed for a long time.

One thing is clear. This government has said to the Canadian public and the business community that we would meet our targets and the targets will be met.

* * *

[Translation]

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Human Resources Development. Of all the recommendations made in the Liberals' majority report on social program reform, one is particularly heinous since it aims to require that young people work more weeks than the rest of the population in order to qualify for unemployment insurance, even though young people already have a hard time finding stable jobs.

Does the Minister of Human Resources Development endorse the recommendation made by his Liberal colleagues, which, in an underhanded and discriminatory way, sets up a two-tiered unemployment insurance system with the lower level of coverage going to young people?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first if I might I would like to take the opportunity to thank all members of the committee on