

Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act

Mr. Benjamin: Yes, and Doug Fisher. They have been saying bad things about the NDP too and we have been going up ever since so I would not worry about that. In fact, if they are so smart, why do they not run against us? I invite members of the Press Gallery to try that. In fact, I invite those same three people who write columns from on high to contest the election in Regina West. I would welcome them there. If I know the people there, even if they did not like me, they would run those three out of town.

To be even more serious, the Bill flies in the face of a piece of great Canadian history which was supported by members of all political Parties in the 1950s and 1960s. I am thinking of the likes of John Diefenbaker, Tommy Douglas, Lester Pearson and many others from all Parties who established a regime under which all the people of Canada shared in the costs of university education and health care services.

In my last minute may I say that we can do no less than not only return to the 1977 funding formula as promised by my good friends opposite but we could ensure through the tax system that the increases in funding for those programs are not decreased. I do not know of any hospital or university that is throwing money away. The hospitals and universities will be affected severely under this Bill. I make a final appeal to the Government and to my colleagues in the Liberal Party and the NDP: there are a few days left to go back to the drawing board and come up with what we all support, which is a return to the 1977 funding formula.

● (2000)

Mrs. Sheila Finestone (Mount Royal): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak once again to Bill C-96. Unfortunately it will bring about reactions and results for which no one in the House was elected or had a mandate to undertake. I would suggest that while we still have a chance we should seriously consider the amendments or at least undertake the consultation promised by the Government prior to cutting or decreasing equalization payment funds and established program financing funds which affect planning and responsibilities at the provincial level.

The federal Government should not have cut its contributions to post-secondary education since Canada is experiencing fundamental technological changes and since our youth and workers need more and more training, retraining, and education if they are to be able to face the challenges ahead of them in this post-technology world. Nothing bespeaks the need for this more as we move toward the Government's goal of entering into a free trade negotiation. That kind of negotiation, as well as negotiating on a multilateral level, will require a change in our workforce and a change in the educational patterns of the people and the workers of Canada. The key to being able to accomplish and meet those challenges will be a better educational program, and certainly better educated workers in society.

Therefore, I should like to bring to your attention, Mr. Speaker, some comments that were made. Rarely do we hear them from a member of the judiciary. I am speaking now

about the remarks of Chief Justice Brian Dickson of the Supreme Court of Canada when he spoke to the graduating students at the University of British Columbia. He pointed out that we were in a tragic underfunding of universities situation, and that it was making Canada a second-class nation. I should like to quote what he said because I think it is information all Members of the House should keep in mind. These remarks come from a man of great and deep conviction, a man who has manifested his concern for the society in which we live, and a man who is in a position to see the impact of change as people come before him in the hallowed halls of the courts of the land. Chief Justice Dickson said the following:

Canada must have good universities with outstanding teachers and world-class research facilities.

Second-class funding of universities will inevitably lead to second-class teachers, second-class students, and—ultimately—a second-class nation.

We love this country too well, every one of us. We are proud of our accomplishments, and we are anxious to see ourselves move forward in today's society. The kind of action undertaken precipitously by the Government will certainly not enable us to continue to grow and to reach that first-class status and first-class stance we all want for our constituents. I want it for my constituents and the young people in my riding of Mount Royal, as does every Member of Parliament for his or her riding.

Chief Justice Dickson went on to say that the lack of funding was bordering on tragic and to choke off universities was the real tragedy. He also added: "It has been said by many people that education is too important to be left to educators. That may be true. But it is also true that education is too important to be left to Ministers of Finance", certainly a Minister of Finance who forgot to consult—that famous word about which we have heard so much—his confreres and his partners across the land. I am referring to each and every one of the Finance Ministers and the Premiers of the provinces. Where were the provincial Ministers of Education in these consultations? What happens to their long-term planning? They cannot plan on just a short-term program. They need five-year funding plans. It involves a great deal of considered effort and intelligent observation, as well as a deep knowledge of the system in each province, in order to develop the kind of curriculum which will produce the young and retrained we need for society.

In his federal Budget last May, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) announced plans to limit annual increases in transfer payments to the provinces health and post-secondary education systems. The weak excuse he used in doing that shows the kind of priority he places upon consultation and the very difficult role which our partners at the provincial level have to play. He forgot that they have a responsibility as well. Unilaterally, because he had this bug about decreasing the deficit at any cost, he went ahead and moved in a very serious and sensitive area of society.

To limit annual increases in transfer payments to the provinces for the post-secondary education and health sectors