

*The Budget*

see placed in the hands of Canadians in need, dollars better spent on social housing or literacy instruction, dollars we need to eradicate child poverty, and dollars we need to meet our international obligations as a nation of great wealth and advantage. The thought of how much better we might use these dollars causes me to accept the need to reduce the deficit.

The unproductive nature of interest expenditure is partially responsible for the resistance of Canadians to broad tax increases. Our citizens pay more but see less in return as we finance past expenditure.

Even as I speak in favour of deficit reduction, I call on our government to exercise compassion and creativity as it implements the budget over the next 12 months. All Canadians must share in the mission of reclaiming our fiscal and monetary autonomy. In return, government has the responsibility to be fair, creative, thoughtful and forthright.

The approach I endorse contrasts dramatically with that outlined by the Reform Party in its recent attempt at a budget proposal. While the Reform Party's position does not surprise me, I do find shocking that my colleague from Saint John would support it. Does the fact that she supports the view we have not eliminated the deficit quickly and decisively enough also mean that she supports the approach as outlined? The Reform agenda would destroy the fragile but real recovery we are experiencing in New Brunswick. It is sad its prescribed medicine would only push us back into the sick bed of dependency it speaks of so often.

The government is committed to a balanced but disciplined approach to deficit reduction. Canadians have been asked to help and I believe there exists an acceptance of the need to bring revenue and expenditure closer together.

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The Minister of Finance is committed to seeing social tax expenditures scrutinized with the same vigour as has been applied to other social spending. He has acknowledged the need for more comprehensive tax reforms.

The government has spoken of Canada's commitment internationally on the need to come to terms with currency speculation and sharing more fairly the benefits of new technologies.

Not only does the government need to balance spending reduction with tax fairness, it is also necessary to be prepared to do things differently, to be more creative, to consider solutions quite outside conventional thinking in the application of the budget.

Significant change does not come easily in large bureaucracies. Through no one's fault inertia is a powerful force and change, particularly dramatic change is seldom seen. Canadians from all walks of life have been asked to change their thinking, to expect less and contribute more.

I believe we will meet that challenge but in return, government must be prepared to change its thinking, to listen seriously and consider outside, sometimes unconventional, solutions.

As a member of the parliamentary committee on human resources development, I can attest to the fact that many Canadians believe for example that the federal government should show leadership in eliminating overtime and considering a shorter work week. This would soften the effect of expenditure reduction on our employees while setting an example for other governments and the private sector with the view of sharing better the jobs that currently exist in this country.

A second area where government must show leadership is in our approach to economic development. We must carve out clearly in a mixed economy the role of government and apply available resources and regulatory power toward that end. We must be prepared to use our legitimate power to make the market work for as many Canadians as possible, whether it is increasing the availability of capital to small and medium sized businesses, direct financial support for community development, pushing more forcefully the need for private sector retraining and upgrading, or taking a more vocal stand internationally on questions of employment standards or tax fairness.

If the government can no longer afford to offer as much protection to those for whom the market does not work, it must accept a larger role in ensuring that the market works for more Canadians.

I said at the start that I was anxious to participate in this debate because it marks the beginning of a new era for Canada. Some Canadians have said we are getting meaner. Others, unhappily, say we have not been mean enough. I am an optimist. I believe we can find that place where we gradually disentangle ourselves from the vulnerable relationship we have with the money markets but where we also recognize the vulnerable relationship many Canadians have with us.

Yes, we can find that balance but ultimately it is not in the numbers. The balance we seek and must find lies in the hearts and minds of Canadians, in our compassion, our creativity, our generosity and ingenuity.

As a member of the committee that travelled Canada for the social security review, I can assure the House that Canadians have ideas, ideas born of a desire to eradicate poverty, to teach people to read and offer shelter and jobs. They want us to listen,