

Adjournment Debate

[English]

Although the federal government supports education in a number of ways, since 1986 it has continually reduced its contributions to post-secondary education.

By 1994 the federal government will have slashed \$9.5 billion in transfer payments to the provinces. In last February's budget it cut spending on education by \$485 million. Obviously the government's lack of commitment to education will have dire consequences for our country if no solutions are devised.

Foremost among problems related to education is that of illiteracy. Without a population having adequate reading and writing skills, Canada risks losing its competitive edge internationally in the long run. The costs of this problem are staggering. A 1988 report by the Canadian business task force estimated that the direct cost of illiteracy to business each year to be about \$4 billion and the total cost to society to be about \$10 billion. What has the government done to resolve this problem? Little, save to impose a 7 per cent tax on reading materials, a direct blow to the literacy movement.

Another point I would like to touch on is that of accessibility to education. Obviously this factor has been one of the lowest priorities of the federal government. In fact the maximum level for the Canadian Student Loans Program has not risen since 1984. Moreover, the inequality of opportunity for young Canadians will be exacerbated by three measures recently announced by the federal government.

The first is a 3 per cent administrative fee on student loans which effectively taxes those who can least afford it. Interesting. Those who do not have to borrow will not be taxed but the larger the loan, that is the greater the need, the greater the tax.

Second, the goods and services tax will apply to books and other learning resources, to clothes and to a number of other supplies required by students.

Third, recent cuts to the Summer Employment Experience Program have diminished students' ability to support themselves through their educational career.

Spending on education, research and development are investments in the future. In the long run a properly educated populace, a training system that operates with efficiency, sensitivity and responsiveness to labour mar-

ket needs, and increased research and development will only increase the wealth of our country and opportunities for further social development.

Finally I must urge the Conservative government to put its money where its mouth is and to provide the resources needed by our educational system to help our country achieve its full potential.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre H. Vincent (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, you will understand that I do not agree with what the hon. member said and I think that if you could speak on it, you would not agree either. He says that the government does not support education. This government did more for education in 1984 than the party which my colleague represents did when it governed in the years before that.

The government spends \$11 billion a year on education. The only point on which I agree with the hon. member is that the results are not great. I agree with that. If you compare with other countries, he is right. In Canada, most young people who could go to university do not, and that is unfortunate.

That does not mean we should spend more money; it means that we should reallocate our resources so that young Canadians receive academic training. Even if we spent \$2 billion more, if young people do not want to get an education money will not make them do so.

I would like to point out that in 1991-92 we are spending \$5.7 billion on education not including unemployment insurance funds which amount to \$1.8 billion in 1992, up from \$1.4 billion in 1991. Nor does it include another program on which we spent \$2.3 billion in 1990-91 and will spend \$3.1 billion in 1991-92. You will understand, Mr. Speaker, that enough money is there for young Canadians to receive the education to which they are entitled. But it is necessary—

[English]

GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS AND TRADE

Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma): Mr. Speaker, on February 5, I put a question to the Prime Minister about the very serious concern of Canadian farmers in the supply management sectors of dairy, poultry and egg production.