

Private Members' Business

The recent budget further benefited the families of students by increasing the amount of tuition fees and tax credits that can be claimed by a supporting spouse, parent or grandparent from \$600 to \$680. Both corporations and individuals are encouraged through the income tax system to make charitable contributions to educational institutions. In total these tax provisions directly benefit some one million Canadians, whether they are students or families of students.

Not only that. The government's commitment to supporting education is strongly reflected by our exemption from the GST of many educational services provided by colleges and universities. Among the exemptions are tuition fees for credit courses leading to a diploma or a degree, fees for seminars and conferences, accommodation and meal plans.

As I have shown, the federal government is doing everything it can to support a broad range of educational opportunities for Canadian students. The OECD figures indicate that Canada already spends more than any other member country on education as a percentage of government expenditures.

I say to my hon. friend that we are in a time of economic renewal. As a responsible government we must be prudent and give very careful consideration to any new measures that would significantly affect spending Canadians' hard earned tax dollars.

Canadians are not required to pay tuition to attend elementary and secondary schools. Allowing tax credits for primary and secondary level education would mean a substantial increase in costs for the government and ultimately the taxpayers. Moreover, this would not guarantee increased expenditures on education.

While well intentioned, Bill C-300 is not in the best interests of children with disabilities. A child with a disability is in reality a child like any other child. He or she wants and needs to be part of the mainstream of life, to learn and to play with others. The bill proposed by the hon. member, while well intentioned though it may be, is not in line with this fundamental principle.

As for participation in higher education, here too the emphasis must be on access to the programs of regular

colleges and university, not on the creation of separate facilities.

The Secretary of State as minister responsible for the status of disabled persons has therefore provided funds to support the establishment of centres of development at several universities across Canada. These centres seek to develop methods and services that will permit students with disabilities to gain the fullest possible access to learning opportunities and other aspects of life on campus. In all of these areas the federal government is working closely with groups promoting the interests of persons with disabilities.

Likewise, when it announced the prosperities and learning initiative a year ago, the government recognized the key to strengthening our systems of education and training. This is to encourage all of the stakeholders, parents and children, young adults, business and labour and learning institutions, to work together to identify goals and seek solutions. The theme of the government's post is best summed up in the title of one of the major discussion papers: *Learning Well—Living Well*.

It is through the consultative and co-operative efforts that we will find the ways to ensure the best possible education opportunities for all Canadians, not through costly ineffective changes to the income tax system.

• (1740)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Duhamel: Mr. Speaker, I apologize for interrupting, but at the end of my speech I asked whether there was unanimous consent for going ahead with this bill and referring it to committee. I did not get an answer to my question. Is there unanimous consent for sending the bill to committee?

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): The Chair notes there is no unanimous consent.

[*English*]

Mrs. Dorothy Dobbie (Winnipeg South): Mr. Speaker, I am sorry, I say to my colleague, that we could not find unanimity. This is a very important topic and of course we want to respond as fully as we possibly can.