

The Budget

An hon. member: He has exceeded them.

Mr. O'Brien: He exceeded those targets. They see this not as the ultimate end but as a major step in the right direction, contrary to what we have witnessed over the past several years.

What the minister has done in the budget is put the Canadian family on a diet. We have gained an unhealthy, crushing weight which must be lost. We know that. It is the deficit and the debt. This weight was not gained suddenly. It was not gained overnight. No one party, no one group of our society is at fault here, despite the views of some that look for simplistic answers and are quick to point the finger. This crushing weight was gained as a nation and that is how it must be lost. It must be lost gradually. It will not be effectively lost in any sudden downsizing or slash and burn approach to the problem.

Similarly it is a sensible way for an individual to lose weight. Canadians are all too familiar with the problem, many of them being overweight, as I confess to be. It is the sensible approach to take in trying to deal with the serious economic problems we face.

In October 1993 two visions were put before the people of Canada about this serious problem. There was the gradual, determined, downsizing approach of our party and the more dramatic, sudden effort to downsize put forward by the Reform Party. In a democratic way the people of Canada spoke on October 25, 1993. They made it very clear with the results by passing judgment on the previous government's efforts in this regard. They very clearly chose between the two options presented by the Liberal Party and the Reform Party.

It is clear to me as it is to most Canadians that this nation deliberately chose a sensible, gradual approach to downsizing and to eliminating the deficit and debt. Given the reception of the budget in the two weeks since it was presented, Canadians have once again endorsed this approach.

Acceptance of this budget is very high. National and international financial experts have lauded it as balanced, as fair, as a common sense way to deal with our problems. I am not necessarily enamoured of experts, frankly. The people I am most interested in hearing from are the people of Canada. Roughly 70 per cent of them—this has varied by a point here or there from day to day—have consistently said they are pleased with the budget brought in by the Minister of Finance.

There are those critics that feel the budget was too easy, too soft and not tough enough. It is interesting because in consulting very widely with my constituents I have not heard that from the poor in the country. I have not heard it from the unemployed. I have not heard from the disadvantaged that the budget was too easy or too soft. I would submit that it certainly was not too easy or too soft.

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Then we have critics who suggest that the budget is much too fair and is draconian in what it is attempting to do. I do not hear that from people who are trying to find work and are looking to us to help create jobs.

The unemployed with whom I have spoken know full well that if the government is to help create the climate for jobs and help them find meaningful employment, it will be done by putting our financial house in order.

I was gratified to hear from some of the unemployed in my riding that they understand the minister had to make the tough choices he made and the road to their personal economic future is that the nation's finances must be put back in order.

We hear seven or eight provinces claiming to be the hardest hit. How seven or eight provinces are hardest hit by the budget is beyond me, but that is exactly what we have been hearing.

When I hear a cry from one side that it is much too tough and from the other side that it is not tough enough, I am inclined to say that many of my constituents believe the budget is well balanced. It is tough but fair and the minister got it about right.

They do not like all of the budget. I do not like each and every single thing in the budget. Certainly Canadians do not like the pain that is in the budget for them individually, be they farmers in western Canada or some of my farm constituents, be they business people—

Mr. Cannis: Nothing is perfect.

Mr. O'Brien: That is right. Nothing is perfect and no budget is perfect. However Canadians generally accept that the budget is tough and fair and that the cuts undertaken were necessary.

Let me come to my constructive criticism that I have had the opportunity to make personally to the Prime Minister. In certain cases we could be selectively tougher. That is the way I would put it.

I hope future budgets will be a little tougher on wealthy individuals and corporations. I applaud the move to be tougher with the banks, but perhaps we will have to go further. Quite frankly the signal I hear from the minister and from the government. There is a message in the budget for the banks, for wealthy individuals and for corporations that there are other budgets to come and if they are not going to do more to help the economy of the country get going tougher measures can be brought in. This is something I will be watching closely as a Canadian and as a member of Parliament on the government side of the House.

The specifics of the budget are well known, but let me recall for Canadians two or three of the most important points. The key interim deficit target, as I said, was met and exceeded as my colleagues have pointed out: 3 per cent GDP by 1996-97.