

Government Orders

On the other hand, as I look at this bill there are some concerns and questions I would raise. There are two questions. Can the federal government, under our present fiscal circumstances, afford to continue the current level of equalization transfers to the seven provinces? This House must answer that question.

It is more incumbent upon us than previous houses because we are faced with an upcoming budget. We are faced with a deficit, most likely in this new budget, of at least \$38 billion dollars as I understand. In the current budget we are faced with \$44 billion to \$46 billion of deficit. We have an accumulated deficit of \$500 billion and most likely if things continue as they are by the end of this 35th session the accumulated deficit could be \$600 billion.

We must show respect for that. Our concern, as pointed out well by my colleague, is that we feel this is one of the areas where we should have reduced the cost of government and we called for a 10 per cent cut. That is a question that I raise in the House. The rest of the members should raise the very same one as we raise in the Reform Party.

The second question I want to raise is equally significant. Is there equality in the federal transfer payments to provinces beyond Bill C-3 which we are facing today? Is there equity built into other programs beyond Bill C-3?

• (1325)

I would again like to remind hon. members of the objectives of Bill C-3. The first objective is to transfer federal funds to the seven provinces to raise their per capita income to a representative sample of \$4,800 on a per capita basis. The second objective, and this is from the material given to us in our briefing, set out by the government, is to enable provincial governments to provide their residents reasonable, comparable levels of public services at reasonable levels of taxation.

In other words, Bill C-3 is to create a level playing field across Canada. Every province has a somewhat equal opportunity to serve its electors with services that they need in terms of health, education and social services, supporting their highway structures, their infrastructures and so on.

It is to build in that level playing field. That is what we are doing with Bill C-3. I want to raise a point to put the government on notice, that when it moves into new program areas it keeps that understanding in mind. It is very important.

Government often forgets. I can give some personal experiences which I will in my remarks. We must think of the infrastructure program that we just announced to Canadians. We said in that infrastructure program that we would have a factor in there in terms of employment or unemployment that would allow some provinces to get more of the infrastructure dollars than others.

If we create equalization by Bill C-3, why then do we build that into the infrastructure program if it is not already there? We could look at retraining programs. One will find the very same thing.

I would like to look at a document that I received from the Privy Council just a few days ago. It is a good reference when I examine the question that I raised in this Parliament. This document is called "Federal-Provincial Programs and Activities: A Descriptive Inventory 1992-93". The Privy Council put it out as of November 1993. It is an up to date, current document that should be referenced.

How does one recommend it to all the members of Parliament? It is a document that I used many times as a leader of the opposition in the Alberta legislature to raise the question with the government at that time. I asked if it were receiving a fair share as Albertans from various federal programs. If one looks through the document one will find the answer to that question.

I would like to raise a couple of points. First there is the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. I was one of the ministers from Alberta who negotiated Alberta's share of the moneys available through that program for housing in Alberta.

I remember sitting around the table and walking through those negotiations. I remember my attitude and it reflects on the question I raise here. My attitude at that time was that if some of the other provinces, the maritime provinces, Saskatchewan, or the Northwest Territories, required more funding to meet some of its social housing needs, I was prepared to be flexible, move on that and to give a portion of Alberta's moneys to them.

In other words I was saying because Alberta should have x per cent or whatever it is, 10 per cent or 11 per cent of the federal funding relative to our population, I was willing to give on that. I saw that there may be a need out there that needed to be met. There were less fortunate in terms of revenue than we were in the province of Alberta. I was willing to give.

As I look at this today relative to Bill C-3 and equalization, as a minister at that time I could have sat at the table and said equalization has occurred. We had a formula in place. Today we are putting through Bill C-3 hopefully to become legislation. We are going to put that in place.

• (1330)

Perhaps Alberta at that point in time should have received a percentage of the grant relative to its percentage of the Canadian population. Looking at the structure it does not quite work that way.

For example under the RRAP Newfoundland received \$12 per capita, Alberta received \$2.10 per capita, and Ontario received \$1.85 per capita. The question is: After equity, should there have