

*Oral Questions*

payments to Quebec alone of a quarter of a billion dollars. He was a member of that government. I know the hon. member is well versed in this matter, and that is one of the options.

Another option we are presenting is a way of finding a formula that would add an additional \$10 billion to the funding of higher education, \$10 billion that would go for funding laboratories and libraries and increased accessibility.

[Translation]

**Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, this is a government which definitely intends to cut transfers to the provinces for post-secondary education and thinks that it can hide behind a government which I was proud to quit.

Do the minister, the government and the governing party realize that by cutting federal contributions to the provinces, the reform of social programs will add to students' indebtedness and transfer part of the federal debt problem onto them?

[English]

**Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. Leader of the Opposition had so much pride that he did not dare open his mouth or leave a government at the time when the Conservative government cut transfer payments to Quebec by a quarter of a billion dollars. That is how much pride he has. Why did he not speak up then if he is so strong now?

I will simply point out one fundamental fact. There is nothing in our proposal that says we will cut the transfer payments to provinces. The provinces today receive over \$6 billion in transfer payments. Ten years from now they will receive \$6 billion in transfer payments. All this talk about a reduction of \$2.6 billion is pure rubbish.

• (1420)

**Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I had so many reasons to leave that government I did not have time to express them all when I left.

How can the minister claim that the acquisition of knowledge is a primary goal of this government and the main method to encourage economic development when at the same time his reform will block access to university for thousands of Canadians and Quebecers?

**Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the first time I have ever been in an agreement with the hon. chief of the opposition is when he said there were so many reasons to leave the past government. The only question I have in return is why did he leave it so late?

I said in my answer to the previous question that we clearly have stated we will continue the transfer payments based on the formula in place now.

What we want to do, and this is why we are simply putting a proposal out for serious discussion and debate, is to find a formula that will add an additional \$10 billion over the next 10 years, an additional \$10 billion that can be used to provide further access for students who cannot get there now.

There are a quarter million Canadians in today's workforce who want to go back to college and university. We have to find a way of funding them. We have to find a way of improving the spaces, the facilities and the services.

That is the reason we have to find more money for the system and we want to do it on the basis of finding a fair allocation between government, the private sector and the students.

[Translation]

**Mr. Antoine Dubé (Lévis, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, my question is also for the Minister of Human Resources Development.

The minister persists in denying the negative impact of his reform on Canadian students' indebtedness and on accessibility to post-secondary education. By cutting transfer payments to provinces for post-secondary education, his reform will have the effect of at least doubling tuition fees in the very first year, according to the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

How can the minister continue to claim that access to post-secondary education will not be reduced, considering the unprecedented increase in tuition fees triggered by his reform?

[English]

**Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have never made those claims. What I have said in fact is that under the system we have now tuition fees have been rising at a rate of 10 per cent a year.

I want to point out, particularly to the member of the Bloc Québécois, that is not our decision. That is a decision taken by provincial governments. They make decisions on education, not the federal government. It is the federal government that transfers the money. Unfortunately a lot of the money we transfer never ends up in the hands of the universities.

[Translation]

**Mr. Antoine Dubé (Lévis, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the minister says he has never made such claims, but this is what he wrote in his green book.

How can the minister remain so insensitive to the current problem of students getting into debt? Indeed, by triggering a twofold increase in tuition fees, his reform will result in heavier debt loads, to the point where many will no longer dare to pursue