

Established Programs Financing

Mr. Speaker: The Chair was very specific in inviting the Hon. Member to make her observations on Motions Nos. 1, 2 and 3. It could not have been more specific. The Hon. Member was invited to so comment and the Chair has made a ruling.

Ms. Pauline Jewett (New Westminster-Coquitlam) moved:

That Bill C-12 be amended in Clause 8 by adding immediately after line 25 at page 7 the following:

"(3) Any such cash contribution for hospital insurance and medical care programs and post-secondary education program shall be expended by the province for the purposes of those programs only."

She said: Mr. Speaker, one of the problems of the transfer of funds under the post-secondary education provisions of the fiscal arrangements Act is that the funds do not need to be expended by the provinces for the purposes for which they were intended. The provinces can take these moneys and spend them in any fashion they please and, indeed, many provinces have been doing so. It was quite apparent that all members of the committee from all three Parties felt that the time had come when the federal Government's contributions to the financing of post-secondary education should be earmarked and used by the provinces for the purposes intended.

We realize that this Motion No. 4, which reads with respect to post-secondary education transfers:

Any such cash contribution for hospital insurance and medical care programs and post-secondary education program shall be expended by the province for the purposes of those programs only.

This motion, we realize, is in some way symbolic rather than real because, in fact, these are relatively limited amounts of money. They are only a drop in the bucket compared with the total amount which the federal Government makes possible for post-secondary education, either through transfers or tax points. Therefore, with this amendment we are only getting at a tiny part of the problem in cash terms. Indeed, one could probably argue, and others will, that most provinces will undoubtedly be spending or have already spent the money embodied in the six and five increases provided by this Bill. We understand that the whole operation of fiscal transfers and tax points is not covered, indeed it cannot be, under this particular Bill. That will have to await a complete re-examination by the federal and provincial Governments of the financing of post-secondary education.

● (1520)

There was much concern expressed on all sides about the absence of accountability in the field of post-secondary education funding. Everyone on the committee—and I think I can speak for everyone on the standing committee—argued quite strongly that the provinces should not be able to spend the federal contributions in any fashion they pleased, such as on highways or put it into their general revenue fund, or whatever. Some signal should be given to the provinces from the federal Parliament of Canada that their practices were contrary to the spirit of the federal contribution to post-secondary education.

We found, at least in the course of all my discussions with the experts in the field, that the way we could get that message

across would be through this kind of amendment. It would be a very clear signal to the provinces that the Parliament of Canada felt that it had a responsibility to the taxpayers of Canada to ensure that the moneys being transferred would be spent in the way that Parliament and the taxpayers intended them to be spent.

I may say that we in this Party opposed block funding at the time it was first introduced in 1977 because we feared that exactly what has happened would happen, that the provinces would not in all cases spend the money on post-secondary education. But we cannot repair that now. I think every Member of this House is hopeful that in the course of the next six or eight months we will, however, together with the provinces find a new formula in which the provinces are accountable for the spending of federal transfers on post-secondary education. In the meantime, surely all would agree with the spirit of Motion No. 4.

This is an extremely important message to get across, namely, that we want to have some degree of accountability for the spending by the provinces of money that this Parliament allocates for post-secondary education. Until we get a new formula and an adequate system of accountability, which as I say will come within the next few months, we should proceed with this motion in the interval.

Mr. Lyle S. Kristiansen (Kootenay West): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak in favour of Motion No. 4 which reads:

That Bill C-12 be amended in Clause 8 by adding immediately after line 25 at page 7 the following:

"(3) Any such cash contribution for hospital insurance and medical care programs and postsecondary education program shall be expended by the province for the purposes of those programs only."

While there is a great concern right across the country, particularly in the student and academic community, I believe it is fair to say that nowhere is this feeling as strong and universal as it is in my own constituency of Kootenay West, and more particularly in my own home of Nelson, British Columbia. In dealing with this Bill, both inside and outside this House, I have outlined the situation in that province and in my own community. For the second time in seven years a provincial Government has closed the post-secondary institution in that community. These are the only times that a university facility has been closed in Canada, to my knowledge, and both of them were in the same community, a community of only 10,000 souls.

Mr. MacLaren: Mr. Speaker, I have a point of order. I regret to interrupt the Hon. Member but it seems to me that we are now having a discussion on substance rather than a discussion, which I understood the Speaker to introduce, of whether Motion No. 4 is in order.

Ms. Jewett: It is in order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Herbert): Order, please. We are debating Motion No. 4.

Mr. McDermid: Where have you been?