

Government Orders

We must also repay the huge debt that was left to us and on which interest is accumulating every day faster than we are paying it off. That too is our responsibility.

The bill before us must be seen in the global perspective of the financial responsibilities taken on by the Minister of Finance and by this government over the past seven years. That is what this bill is all about. I am convinced that opposition members will rise today and say that we should have spent more here, that we spent unwisely there. But judgment has to be exercised in dealing with reality here.

I am always prepared to discuss fully with my friends opposite the appropriateness of any government expenditure. But I am not prepared to discuss with them when they stand up every two minutes or so to ask for more money. They are asking for more money in every area of activity under the sun. They take a shot at everything they can without ever suggesting where the money should come from. Asking is easy—as Our Lord said: “Ask and you shall receive”—but this is Parliament, not the church. In that sense, I have nothing against the Opposition asking for money, but would they be so kind as to tell me at the same time where to find that money. In the taxpayers’ pockets? Or should we cut a program and replace it? Where are we going to take the money they ask for?

That is the question I would like members opposite to ask themselves today before they rise in this House to speak against this bill—

An hon. member: There is no substance in this bill.

Mr. Vincent: I see that they are waking up. At least we managed to wake them up a bit.

Before they start criticizing this bill, they should ponder on this because it is important. Members can be partisan, and I generally do my share at that, but this bill we are considering this morning represents an important part of what this party and this Parliament want for our country tomorrow morning and the next day as well as five and ten years down the road. That is what we should bear in mind as we debate this bill, how it should be seen.

Can we afford to keep running this country on a full credit card, charging maximum interest rates when we

can have another credit card? That is where we are at. That is the question we must ask ourselves when dealing with government finance in Canada in 1992: what can we afford to do to help the people of Canada while ensuring that our country will be in reasonably good financial health in the future? That is the question we must ask ourselves for every dollar that we spend.

In closing, I will raise a last point. In 1984, government operating costs represented 19.3 per cent of the total budget, compared to 16.6 per cent today. That is a 3 per cent reduction of operating costs over total government spending in 7 years. This means sound management in this House as well as in the government backrooms. It is important to emphasize this point because it shows that we have accomplished what we said we would do in 1984 and in 1988. It is important to emphasize this point because, as we are talking, Canadians need good news. They do not need a constantly pessimistic message like the one we hear from the opposition. Canadians need to see the light at the end of the tunnel. They need to see that their government takes action, that it makes decisions that are not necessarily popular, but that it knows what must be done for the country. Canadians definitely do not need to hear time after time, day after day, week after week, the members of the opposition talk about doom and gloom without ever giving a ray of hope as regards the economic and financial reality of Canada.

● (1130)

Mr. Speaker, you just informed me that my time is up. I hope that my colleagues will understand the underlying message of this bill, that they will support this legislation, that they will start to be positive and that they will bring to this House elements of solution and positive suggestions, instead of criticizing like they have now for seven years.

Hon. Bob Kaplan (York Centre): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the parliamentary secretary. He talked with great pride about the ability of his government to reduce the deficit and to face inherent problems. The member said that the time had come to seize the opportunity. If the government has that ability—and I remind him that his government promised seven years ago to eliminate the deficit—why has his government postponed its attempts for so long? Even if those attempts were un-