

Government Spending

before that the bill will be ready for the House to study and make changes as need be.

● (1600)

Madam Speaker, I just want to reiterate the position of the government on expenditures. This year we have already cut \$967 million in expenditures from the budget. These had been approved by the cabinet. The government has done this in order to make a contribution to the restraint program. We said, also, that for next year we will reduce to only 1.5 per cent the increase in the number of public servants to be hired by the government. We said that many of the other expenditures will be controlled. We said, for instance, that there will be no buying of new furniture for public servants next year and that there will be no buying of new automobiles. We also mentioned that there will be no first-class travel for public servants, and so on.

In response to the request of the Leader of the Opposition, these are some of the things we are doing. We are doing our utmost to make cuts. I wish the Leader of the Opposition would not pick out a single item such as one of the biggest airports in the world. I am disappointed that the Leader of the Opposition did not give us some very concrete suggestions about where cuts should be brought about, rather than referring to a point like that.

[Translation]

Under these circumstances, Madam Speaker, it is quite easy to make a speech such as this. I thought the leader of the opposition would be a lot more specific and his colleagues would enlighten us about the truly outstanding areas where we might have set the example. At no time, however, have they come up with concrete propositions.

Perhaps it would be indicated for me at this time to recommend to the leader of the opposition to start having discussions with his rank and file, so that I may not have to note every day: some opposition members rose to ask the government for additional expenses. If they want us to spend more, let them say so, but let them refrain rising every other week to ask us to cut out government spending. There is not one day, Madam Speaker, where members of the opposition which I have begun to name, do not stand up to ask the government to spend considerable sums of money for projects that are important to them. I do not blame them for it; it is normal. But when they do so, they must bear in mind the implications of their demands. If we accept them, the government will have to increase its spending. If a member asks one day that the government increase its expenditures, he must not—if he is consistent—stand up the next day to ask to reduce them. Members should make up their minds. Then we could listen to them. But as long as they will keep putting such inconsistent requests, it will be difficult to do so. That is why, Madam Speaker, the Canadian people are not so eager to put them in power.

[English]

Mr. Stanfield: I rise on a point of order, Madam Speaker, simply with regard to the minister's reference to my calling him a Scrooge. The minister disappointed me in this respect. I often criticize him, but I have always found him to be straightforward. He knows perfectly well that my reference to him as a Scrooge is a bit of a joke between

us, and, I am a little disappointed that he should try to convert that into a public argument.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Morin): Order, please. The hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby (Mr. Broadbent).

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa-Whitby): Madam Speaker, I enjoyed most of the rhetorical outburst of the minister in his castigation of the official opposition for not presenting in detail any proposed budget cuts. If I listened accurately—I certainly listened with care—that was the gist of his speech. He made two points. I am sure he will correct me if I am wrong. One was that the official opposition did not document in any specific way its own general claim that there should be cutbacks. I am in agreement with that. In addition, he went on to suggest in some specific way what the government is doing. I shall deal, in the main body of my comments, with precisely what the government is and is not doing. He referred to the kind of cutbacks the government made in its last budget. In the course of my comments I will deal with parts of that budget and, specifically, the cutbacks in the medicare and hospitalization programs. I should like to hear the minister defend his position in this respect.

The second point is this. At no time since the recess, and nowhere in the white paper, has the government indicated it wants to cut back any specific program other than those mentioned last spring. My understanding is that proposals came forward to the minister from the Department of Finance—they subsequently went to the cabinet—concerning specific cutbacks in departments and areas. There was a suggestion that some things were not needed and they should be scrapped or modified. The fact is that the government has not announced, since we resumed this sitting this fall, any cutbacks in any programs. I think the minister will agree that, factually, this is the case.

In case the minister might turn to me and levy the same charge that he did to the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield), I will make specific points about the kind of cuts we think should be made in government expenditures. In doing so, I say that we do not share the view that over-all cutbacks in the government sector alone are necessary in terms of dealing with the economy. However, there is no doubt that certain specific programs should be either entirely cut out or substantially reduced.

What are some of the things the New Democratic Party suggest? First of all, we oppose the hundreds of millions of dollars now being spent annually in consultants' fees for studies done by private individuals outside the government. It is almost impossible for an opposition party to see the internal operations of a department. However, I have no doubt that if the government were tough-minded about it, hundreds of millions of dollars could be saved partly, but not exclusively, by the Department of Urban Affairs. In some cases the work that is being done could be performed by public servants already on the payroll. We contend further efforts should be made to reduce the amount of money spent on outside consultants.

An hon. Member: Mr. Blakeney could use that advice.

Mr. Broadbent: He not only uses it; he follows it. He has taken steps to do just that. The second point is that government outlay in respect of the salaries of senior civil