

Routine Proceedings

It is old ground that this government inherited a very difficult tax. This tax is a very difficult one for Canadians. In the last few years it was a focal point for tax unrest and government unrest and there would indeed be many members of this House who are here today because of that general public unrest with the previous government.

We have taken this issue. It is one of the first things that we did when the House sat. I can remember presenting on behalf of the government the motion to the House of Commons committee in the first week of business in which we stated quite clearly in the speech from the throne and in the committee on the first day that we were going to fulfil the commitment from the red book.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my thanks to those in the former opposition caucus of the Liberal Party and in the office of the Leader of the Official Opposition for their work in preparing the red book.

I used to be very involved with the policy process of the Liberal Party of Canada and it took us years to get people to agree that the best way to succeed in politics was to present a clear mandate, a clear choice to Canadians as to what we intended to do in the government.

This red book is the first serious effort of a major party to present a document of substance and I think the fact that we have used it as a benchmark in our actions is a tribute to the Prime Minister and to his cabinet.

Our inquiry was in response to the red book commitment of the government to have the finance committee "report on all options for alternatives to the current GST", and "replace the GST with a system that generates equivalent revenues, is fairer to consumers and to small business, and minimizes disruption to small business, and promotes federal-provincial fiscal co-operation and harmonization".

That motion was passed unanimously by that committee on the first day of its business and all three parties voted to begin its work.

It was with a great deal of spirit of co-operation that witnesses were called, were questioned, and I think that the committee soon began to recognize the complexity of the GST issue as part of the consumption tax strategy of the national government.

● (1535)

It is not well known but the federal government entered the income tax field in 1917 in response to its fiscal prices during the first world war and the began to enter the consumption tax deal by various means in 1923.

Therefore the government has been involved with one form of consumption tax or another for the last 70 years. As one begins to reform these taxes, to restructure them and to build a new tax

that is completely different than the previous GST which has, I must admit, been a great frustration for almost every Canadian I met, this committee showed a great deal of maturity to go through each of these issues.

Many Canadians, as I speak today, have not had an opportunity to read the report, as it was just tabled 48 hours ago and is in the beginnings of being distributed. The committee broke its work up into five areas. It looked at the history of the tax and why it was such a difficult tax. It looked at the fact that the GST became an opportunity lost.

I, as a member of the opposition—

Mr. Silye: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I want to know under comments and questions if the member is leading to a question or whether he is making a comment.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Let me see if I can help the member. I asked for questions and comments at the conclusion of the intervention by the hon. member for Calgary Centre. Not seeing anyone seeking the floor, I then called for the resuming of debate and we are in the process of engaging in debate.

Mr. Walker: Mr. Speaker, it was the hon. member who first introduced the sports image of a rookie. I think you are just a rookie camp and looked down at the ball when some guy was coming toward you. Pay attention to the debate and all the subtleties from the Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): I would like to have a bit of the member's time, if I may. I would like to remind all members that although we are leading to possibly a conclusion here some time this week, still direct all of your comments and interventions through the Chair.

Mr. Silye: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I feel the member should withdraw those comments. If he wants to play on a football field I will meet him any time. If he wants to have a war of words—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): That is not a point of order. It will be a debate for another day and another place.

Mr. Walker: Mr. Speaker, I will take your words of caution to heart. I apologize if I have in any way disturbed the Chair.

Continuing the discussion on the GST and the work done by the committee, the committee came to the conclusion that if we were going to be serious about reform of the GST it is important to put into the public domain some of the major options available.

Those options included different proposals brought forward from the public. Some witnesses, for example, wish to see the federal government move away from consumption taxes altogether. Other people wish to see us revamp the system and go with a BTT, a business transfer tax. Other people want to see us