

As is fitting in this great nation we call Canada, some of our people are French Canadians who, though not many in number, are both proud to be francophone Canadians and are determined that this blessed land must stay united.

Economically, the range of activities in my riding includes many different types of farming on some of Canada's richest soil, a plethora of small businesses of every type imaginable, several major industries such as General Motors Diesel and 3M, and such important institutions as Parkwood Hospital, Fanshawe College and London's airport.

It is in juxtaposition to this description of my riding that I now offer my synthesis of the opinions and concerns of my constituents as well as my personal views on the state of the economy and possible budgetary decisions to deal with the crisis.

Having consulted widely with my constituents of London—Middlesex, which included a public pre-budget roundtable forum held in London last week along with my colleagues, the hon. member for London West and the hon. member for London East, I have received a very clear message that our government must do its utmost to encourage the creation of jobs while at the same time taking difficult decisions necessary to reduce the national deficit and debt. A balanced approach is the key to a true economic recovery.

In the field of taxation, it is readily apparent to middle income Canadians that they bear an unjust share of the tax burden in this country. The majority of my constituents favour the elimination of tax loopholes for wealthy individuals and corporations in order to create a more equitable tax structure. Across the board tax increases however would be beyond comprehension at this time.

It is a real concern to many that severe restrictions on RRSP contributions and the elimination in one fell swoop of the capital gains exemption could be unduly punitive and could actually slow our economic recovery.

I have heard the clarion call to establish better priorities for government funding as part of the overdue effort to reduce the national deficit and debt. Surely no priority can be more urgent than the need to invest our tax dollars wisely in the children and youth of Canada. To sell young Canadians short is to condemn this nation to a future of mediocrity, to a future in which Canada would experience horrendous social problems.

• (1650)

It is my personal view that one enormous problem dominates the economic landscape. That is the devastating unemployment crisis and the desperate need for new jobs. Yes, we must slash the deficit and the debt. Yes, we must make our system of taxation more equitable. But any so-called economic recovery which discards hundreds of thousands of Canadians onto the scrap heap of indefinite idleness is no recovery at all.

Government Orders

A Liberal government true to its principles can never accept the economics of indifference which preaches that 5 to 7 per cent unemployment constitutes full employment. We must never write off even one of our fellow Canadians as a faceless statistic for whom we offer no hope. Like many of my hon. colleagues in this House I have seen the human face of these unemployment statistics day after day in my constituency office. It is a face etched with fear and despair. Women and men, young and old, the highly educated and the unskilled, too many Canadians are crying out for the dignity of daily work and a chance to earn a decent living for themselves and their families.

Unfortunately, the cruel reality of our unemployment crisis offers no quick fixes, no easy solutions and no panaceas waiting to be discovered. But let us at least begin.

As a Liberal, one of my fundamental beliefs is that government must play a role in partnership with the private sector if Canada is to pull out of this economic nightmare. To deny that is to deny the lessons of history. And so let us with heroic hearts and strong in will strive, seek and find a better economic course for all Canadians.

In closing, as the member of Parliament for London—Middlesex, I pledge my best efforts to join in the fight to help create a new and better Canada.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ghislain Lebel (Chambly): Mr. Speaker, I heard the speech made by the hon. member opposite and I basically agree with him, except that I am about to turn 50 and all previous governments have invoked tax fairness to impose new taxes again and again to all taxpayers, always in the name of tax fairness.

My question is twofold: first, tax fairness and, second, the creation of steady jobs. I remember that from 1982 to 1987, in Quebec, and the situation was probably the same elsewhere in Canada, we did not wait for the chicken to lay the egg: we went and got that egg while it was still inside the chicken. In other words, we found all kinds of incentives to stimulate the creation of temporary jobs. So much so in fact that recovery in the construction sector in Quebec is currently at an all-time high.

Does the hon. member have a suggestion to promote the creation of steady jobs, and can he give us his views on tax fairness? I am particularly curious about lowering the ceilings for registered retirement savings plans, as well as eliminating the capital gains exemption. I wonder if the hon. member could answer that question.

[*English*]

Mr. O'Brien: I thank the hon. member for his two-part question.