

Government Orders

rural areas from coast to coast. I hope that the Government of Canada will act upon the suggestion that came out of this consultation process; it would make our meeting with these people worthwhile.

The other thing I noticed about this process is the fact that the round tables reflect to some extent the make-up of our society. We heard various stakeholders, members of chambers of commerce, as well as representatives from social, community and economic groups. These people did not necessarily share the same values, far from it, but we tried to reconcile them. The challenge, which has yet to be met by the government, is to include that in its budget.

How can it follow up on that consultation process? How can it take concrete action? The government has yet to show that it listens. For example, no one told us that cuts should be made to the UI program. Yet, the reform that was just proposed does include such cuts and they are significant ones. In any case, these are not the cuts suggested by the participants during this consultation exercise.

Following that tour, we made some findings which are quite telling and which should be told to Quebecers and Canadians. The first one is that as soon as you get away from Ottawa and Ontario in general, decentralization is often proposed as a solution. People in Manitoba, Alberta, Quebec and the Maritimes were well aware that, in order to be able to control the debt and the deficit in the future, the decision making power has to be as close to the citizens as possible. That way, we will know on what basis to assess the performance of a government, and we will avoid not knowing exactly where the money comes from, as is somewhat the case with the transfer payments made by the federal government.

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The second finding is that this vague sharing of powers generates some mistrust toward provincial governments among Canada's progressive groups. Why? Because provincial governments have a power to levy taxes, which is rather limited, while the federal government has the power to levy taxes and to spend in every sector in Canada.

Consequently, this gives the federal government a very positive image as a government that put in place all kinds of programs over the years. The problem is that there is only one taxpayer. Whether it is at the municipal, provincial or federal level, there is only one taxpayer.

In recent years, we discovered that the financial reserve was no longer there. We have to find ways to do things more cheaply. The federal government is having trouble being less visible these days. The Prime Minister said it again this week during question period. The reason why tax points will not be transferred, and transfer payments are maintained instead, is to make

sure that people know that their cheque comes from the federal government.

I would tell the Prime Minister that I agree that if the federal government redistributes among citizens the taxes they paid, they should know where it comes from. But this is not the best, most practical way to do it. The solution might be what Quebec is proposing, to transfer tax points for which the Quebec government would be held accountable; its performance would be judged on the basis of how wisely it spends this money. Right now, people are having trouble figuring out which level of government is responsible for which part of the budget, and why things are done this way; as a result, they cannot assess governments' efficiency.

This is the second point regarding prebudget consultations which I think is important to stress.

Another point is that I firmly believe that these prebudget consultations should go even further. All stakeholders in the social sector should be gathered in a national forum. After my tour of Canada, last year, with the Committee of Human Resources Development, and after listening to the member for Beaches—Woodbine talking about significant and interesting values, stressing the human aspect and raising the whole issue of how we deal with our children, I believe that it would be important for this kind of discourse to be made in the same forum as people who have a much more economically orientated discourse. Their economic discourse talks about cuts and deals strictly in hard financial terms.

When one is a member of both the finance committee and the human resources development committee, one finds the same dichotomy as here in the House between the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Human Resources Development. Each one protects his own bailiwick, and they never meet on common grounds to establish common objectives for society.

If prebudget consultations are to go further in the future, we will have to find a way to bring these people together in some kind of a national forum.

A forum is just one idea I am proposing here; it could gather all the main stakeholders we can find in Canada, but the condition for a group to be represented would be for it to state clearly what its contribution would be. For example, how it would contribute to reducing the deficit.

To sit at that table, the federal government would say for example: One of the efforts we must make next year will be to cut \$1.5 billion in supplementary expenditures or in national defense expenditures.

There is a new exclusive club among banks now, the Billionaire Club. Some banks, and the Royal Bank is first among them, made profits exceeding one billion dollars this year in Canada. Why would they not participate in that national forum and say, for example, that they will create a social job fund and jointly contribute \$500 million so that we can meet the needs of poor