

Government Orders

National standards, to the extent that they apply to this large country, aim at somehow putting all the provinces on an equal footing. It so happens that, out of the ten provinces in Canada, one claims to be different. What makes people and nations different is precisely their differences. You will understand, as will all the members in this House, I am sure, that when the federal government tries to impose standards in the education sector to Quebecers, our province, which defines itself as a state, and which will soon officially become one, must reject such national standards. I might add that the federal government has been trying to impose those standards for several decades.

Mr. Duhamel: Mr. Speaker, first I want to say that I appreciate the comments made by the hon. member. I agree with her first comment. Indeed there are major differences between national and international standards. However, the process is quite similar in that elected representatives sit down together to discuss issues and reach some agreement. The agreement is not imposed: it is negotiated. I do hope that the hon. member will recognize that other side of the coin. Of course, nothing can be perfect but this is not to say that there is no similarity, because there is some similarity.

The hon. member also said that the Canadian government imposes its decisions, but the Quebec government has also done the same on occasion, as well as the government for the Northwest Territories. It may be that we impose our views too often. But to claim that Canada constantly does that is unfair, insensitive and totally inappropriate.

I would like to make another comment. If, some day, Quebec does become an independent nation, then that new nation will decide how it will negotiate and decide whether it wants to deal with Canada. But this is not a fait accompli. Why not work within the existing structure? Why not consider that your party, which forms the Official Opposition, is there to represent all Canadians? I deplore the fact that this is often overlooked. We only talk about Quebec, Quebec and Quebec. I truly love Quebec. My ancestors came from Quebec. I have not forgotten my language nor my culture, but I have a responsibility, as the member for St. Boniface, to represent not only my constituents but also the rest of Canada. And that includes Quebec.

[English]

Mr. Ray Speaker (Lethbridge): Mr. Speaker, in entering this debate on Bill C-3, an act to amend the federal-provincial fiscal arrangements, I want to focus on two things. First, I will make some comments on the bill and equalization and, second, look at equalization in other areas of governments in reference to the formula that we are establishing today.

The bill has two basic purposes. The first purpose is certainly to try to eliminate the disparities that may exist among the provinces. The second is to design a formula for the redistribution of federal taxes to these seven provinces; some \$8 billion in the early stages and as we move to 1999 some \$10.4 billion.

There are some positive aspects of the bill as I examined it. First, the bill does have the support of the provinces of Canada and that is significant in itself.

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Those who have worked at official levels and at ministerial levels have worked it through. They have reached agreement with the provinces and the provinces support the equalization formula that is here and the basic concept. That is important as we as legislators pass this piece of legislation.

The bill is an attempt to reduce fiscal disparities among provinces. As my colleague from Calgary said earlier in the House, basically we as the Reform Party support that objective.

I look back at my own history as a legislator and think back to the 1960s when I entered the legislative assembly of Alberta. This program, as we all recognize, came into effect in 1957. It was in its early stages of maturity and understanding in the mid-1960s. I remember raising the question when I came into the legislature with the premier of the day, the Hon. Ernest Manning. I asked about the resources and the revenue of Alberta being distributed to the other provinces and on what basis we made that decision.

I recall the premier's comments very clearly at that time. He indicated to me that as a have province which has been blessed with natural resources, oil, gas, water and forestry, we have an obligation to help others not blessed with some of the same types of resources. That was the thinking of the fathers of fiscal arrangements with regard to equalization. I see in this bill the same type of thinking.

Another aspect that is positive about this bill is that the formula has a ceiling and a floor to protect the provinces from major revenue reductions and to protect the federal government at the same time from open ended growth in payments. There is also the tax back problem that is dealt with here in this legislation. That is positive in itself.

Still another aspect that is significant is that the payments are unconditional. When we transfer payments from the federal government to the provincial governments, and we expect it to bring about the most amount of equity possible, those dollars cannot have conditions on them. If they are targeted and have conditions on them, what we are going to do is build in another interface that will not allow for flexibility, priority setting and certainly the ability of the provinces to reflect the wishes and the needs of their respective electors.