

Government Orders

For the past few years Reformers have been listening very closely to Canadians to try to determine what those priorities might be. We think we have come pretty close to sensing what Canadians feel is important and what they would be prepared to see go by the way, at least for the time being. After all, I would remind this House that our caucus has grown from one member to 52. That was no small feat and no accident. It came from listening to Canadians and accurately representing their concerns in the election and we are responsible to also represent those concerns in this House.

Let me presume that the priorities of Canadians are also the priorities of Canadians on Prince Edward Island. I know that my comments do not remain in this assembly. The people of Prince Edward Island are watching me. I am not concerned about that because I think the aspirations of the people of Prince Edward Island are not that different than the aspirations of most Canadians. I want to talk about the priorities that I believe are the priorities of the residents of Prince Edward Island.

I know that most Canadians place a high priority on health care. I would just like to relate a little about what is happening in my own province of Saskatchewan. We had governments that liked to build monuments, that liked to build hospitals. We probably have more hospitals per capita in our province than in any other part of Canada. Unfortunately, we now have no money to operate those hospitals. Our priorities were probably wrong. In fact, I am sure they were wrong.

I wonder if the residents of Prince Edward Island would trade away their health care system to have a bridge to the mainland. It is an interesting thought and I have not heard that thought being represented by members on the opposite side.

Also, there is concern for the need for funding of ongoing education, particularly post-secondary education. It is important for young people in every province of Canada, including Prince Edward Island.

Do we want to build a bridge for the young people of Prince Edward Island so they can drive across that bridge and go into the United States to find quality post-secondary education? Or are we going to place a high priority on education within our own country even if it means not expending funds to build a bridge from New Brunswick to the island?

I think of quality of life for our senior citizens. I would like to ask senior citizens if they would be prepared to trade their Canada pension plan for a bridge or financial security in retirement years for another megaproject. These are the types of decision, the types of priorities we need to weigh in our minds.

Being a small business person, a farmer, I have to weigh the benefits of seeing megaprojects go forward or seeing a tax

structure which I can live and prosper within and make reasonable profits for my business.

Canada is facing this fiscal crisis and if we as individuals were in exactly the same situation we would be very prudent to make wise decisions. Unfortunately, governments do not always make those types of wise decisions. Quite often they are thinking about buying a yacht rather than keeping up with the mortgage payments. As the Canadian government, we must not only maintain the mortgage payments but we need to reduce the deficit so that the mortgage does not become totally uncontrollable.

● (1750)

That deficit and that debt also affect the residents of Prince Edward Island and I am sure that if they have a bridge that the country cannot afford to maintain, if they have an economy that does not justify the use of that facility, it will be a sorry day and a difficult thing to explain to future generations.

These are types of illustrations that we as Canadians need to hear if we are going to make wise decisions. We do not want the International Monetary Fund making those decisions for us. We do not want it lowering our credit rating, increasing the cost of borrowing all these dollars that we need if governments are going to continue funding megaprojects when we are past the half-trillion dollar bench mark.

I do not want to carry on too much longer in sort of a gloom and doom approach. I do not think it is time to be down on ourselves but I do believe it is time to make wise decisions as Canadians.

As Reformers we talked to Canadians and said that we feel governments have to cut spending and one area is megaprojects. We received broad support for that position right across the country. Even in Atlantic Canada we received quite a bit of support even though we were fairly new and unknown in that part of the country.

We preached the same message of fiscal responsibility, of placing our priorities on the things that are really important such as health and education, care for our seniors and hope for our young people.

We do not want to erode our reputation of being a country with a high standard of living, one that properly cares for its citizens and one that meets the most important needs of Canadians.

Mr. Len Taylor (The Battlefords—Meadow Lake): Madam Speaker, I very much appreciate the opportunity to be able to enter the debate here today on this important resolution of the House, an amendment to the Constitution of Canada relating to Prince Edward Island's terms of union.