

Subsequent to your explanation I have jumped off the "Band Wagon" of resistance to the GST in view of my enlightenment.

Because I was not aware of all the factors and considerations associated with MST and the GST I naturally resisted change and seemingly unwarranted tax. After discussion with my wife and with an urgent desire to protect our children's future we have decided that we would prefer to see GST applied to restaurant meals at a higher rate rather than having a higher GST rate applied to basic groceries and goods. We do appreciate the need for GST if our commitment to lower the deficit is sincere.

There is the nub of the entire debate. My sense of the mood across the country, particularly in Alberta, is: "Look, we will support this idea of tax reform if you folks are serious about wrestling the deficit to the ground". That was reinforced by the work of the national conference on deficit reduction held on Sunday and Monday of this week.

The summation of the findings of the various committees of that conference was as follows. On the issues of government administration, the advice of Mr. Joe Martin, the rapporteur of that particular committee, was that government should get out of operations and back into governing; that all Canadians should recognize, all of us, the limits of government; that there should be an elimination of duplication among levels of government; that certain privatization initiatives should take place, such as the privatization of airports; that the following services should be contracted out: tax collection, prisons and payrolls; and that consideration should be given to turning Public Works Canada and Supply and Services Canada into Crown corporations in order to put their operations on a more rational basis.

The distinguished economist Dr. Maureen Farrow reported on social programs. She came to the observation that many of the programs which we have in place today were founded in the 1960s and met a 1960s situation. They were programs designed to frustrate regional adjustment to a dynamic economy. She said that incentives must encourage adjustment and universality should be amended and shifted to targeting. She favoured addressing the insufficiencies and the inefficiencies in such programs as health care. As well, she felt that all social programs should be capped as of today in current dollar terms, that governments should then re-allocate the diminishing thought using in-house skill

The Budget

sets, that time and notice should be given to Canadians in pension schemes so that they could make adjustments to real market conditions. No more indexation, said she, and all Canadians should begin to manage their expectations.

An hon. member: It must have been a Tory caucus meeting.

Mr. Edwards: No, this was not a Tory caucus meeting. This was a national conference on deficit reduction.

The summation of the conference was given by the distinguished management consultant and financial adviser, Mr. W. D. Grace, who chaired the economic affairs committee. He concluded that the Government of Canada should immediately put a cap on spending at the current \$103 billion, that there should be appointed a non-profit broad-based body to publicize the deficit to condition Canadians to the problem that is before us, the threat of the debt, and then evaluate and publicize all items of government spending. I believe that the Auditor General would be of great assistance in this regard.

• (1630)

I summarize the findings of the National Conference on Deficit Reduction held in Edmonton this week to indicate to friends, particularly friends opposite, that it is not a grinch budget that we have before us, but rather that a strong body of Canadians are calling for a further diminishing of the expectations of Canadians and what the Government of Canada does for them and to them.

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier): Mr. Speaker, in all fairness, my friend from Edmonton quoted a couple of articles from the Edmonton newspapers. I know he has read the poll that was done by the Edmonton *Sun* in Edmonton, of Edmontonians, and the verdict was that indeed the critic for the Liberal party won the debate hands down. Eighty-nine people said "yes", at least 50—some said "maybe, Mr. Wilson", and the others were not too sure.

I want him to be honest and fair with us and tell us that indeed the press does have this balanced view and approach to the news. As a former broadcaster I know he would want to be fair. Would he not agree with me that indeed the Liberal critic, The hon. member for Gloucester, indeed won that debate.