

Supply

Mr. Maurizio Bevilacqua (York North): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the member for Scarborough—Rouge River on his excellent presentation this morning. He outlined some of the key concerns we as Canadians face in metro Toronto and in the province of Ontario. I would also like to take this opportunity to speak to the issue in a more global sense.

In the past two decades major economic changes have forced Canada to confront rapidly shifting international, political and economic relationships. The pressures of the GATT, the free trade agreement, and the structural deterioration of our economy demand that Canadians find innovative solutions to international competition.

Unfortunately Canada stands extraordinarily exposed to the challenges of an increasingly global economy. This federal government has adopted a hands-off approach to economic management, leaving Canada open to the free play of international forces.

The situation is now so serious that commentators are beginning to speak of a window of opportunity within which Canada might still be able to recover control over its economy.

The legacy of this government's mismanagement of the economy is staggering. One and a half million Canadians unemployed, of which 400,000 are young people.

Since 1989 more than 300,000 manufacturing jobs have vanished, many never to return. We have seen record personal and corporate bankruptcies. Taxation levels are higher than ever even as the federal government plans are drawn up to abdicate its responsibilities further. We are paying more for less.

I have spoken in this Chamber before on the need for a new contract, a new set of arrangements among Canadians. The federal government should play a key role in defining the economic and social relationships within our society.

Historically relationships among Canadians have been marked by confrontation instead of co-operation. The consequences of this history is lack of focus on goals and a total absence of a national vision on the part of this government.

The reasons for this are not difficult to uncover. Although this government speaks of creating an innovative economy, its own policies are more appropriate to bygone days. Its thinking is obsolete.

As many studies have shown the federal government does not understand the dimensions of global change. The evidence for this is everywhere. The federal government, committed to cost cutting, is unwavering even as the entire economy crashes to the ground.

To this government numbers matter more than people. They matter more than jobs. They matter more than the future of our youth. They matter more than the sacred trust of health care of our seniors and of those who have fallen out of the work force. In the messages Canadians have sent to this government there is a palpable sense of betrayal and breach of trust.

The implications of this public distress of the federal government are extensive. As elected representatives we need to communicate with the people as opposed to talking at them.

But prospects for success in this regard are grounded in the perceptions Canadians have of governments. This government has confused the reluctance of Canadians to subscribe to Tory policies with an unwillingness of Canadians to act.

Canadians are ready to act. Canadians continue to believe that they are the makers of their own future. This is a powerful asset. This asset provides a solid foundation for presenting Canadians with choices about how to upgrade their schools and how to ensure Canadians have world-class skills and motivation.

Canadians can understand and want to understand what needs to be done. However Canadians have become lost in the maze of conflicting messages sent by this government. What people hear are statements of concern from this government, but these statements are coming precisely at the same time that this government is ignoring those concerns. It is yet another example of this government pulling back from its responsibility.

There is a widely shared consensus among business leaders that action to upgrade the skills of the work force is needed now. It is vital that the knowledge and skills of those already in the work force be kept current and competitive. The rapid pace of scientific and technologi-