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Regular Members' Input in Proposed Fiscal Reductions

Mr. Ramsay: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to speak today about the budget reduction exercise currently under way by the government. I'm very concerned over the way the government is handling the communication effort on the reduction in, eventually, the reinvestment strategy and the fear that this is causing our employees.

What I've heard from the public and Members of this House was that we should thoroughly examine our spending through zero-based budgeting exercises, which would analyze our spending so that we could take some corrective action on where we spend our dollars. Had this been done, we would have had solid information on which to make decisions.

As a Member of this House the government's plan to reduce spending by \$135 million over the next two years requires a tremendous leap of faith on behalf of myself and Members of this House. I can appreciate where the government is coming from, because I've been saying for the last four years that our spending is not sustainable over the long term. However, since Christmas, rumours abound on what, where, who and how much is going to fall under the government's axe.

I just want to publicly state today for the record what I know. This week our committees finally received the targets that the government was setting for the departments: a \$135 million reduction over the next two years, with \$75 million being reinvested into strategic initiatives. Regular Members have not gotten any level of detail on what's on the chopping block.

There may be some panic in the public service, but the reductions still have to be vetted through our standing committees and the Regular Members of this House. We need to ensure that as Regular Members our ideas and input for both reductions and reinvestment have to be taken seriously by this government.

In our consensus style of government Regular Members have the majority in this House, and I want the public and the public service to know that when it comes to reductions, our input, our thoughts and our ideas will be taken seriously by this government.

The reality is that so far Regular Members on this side of the House seem to be on a need-to-know basis and are being treated that way by the government. I want to let the public service know and let the public know that when the battles are to be fought, the Regular Members will be here to defend the reductions we don't agree with, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.