

are being terribly mismanaged and wasted by the government programs that this member is trying to defend.

It is time Canadians woke up and started doing something better and safer with their money. We are proposing a plan to do that. We believe we will be supported by Canadians.

Ms. Judy Bethel (Edmonton East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at my town hall meetings in Edmonton East over the past year—we have had many of them—talking about these kinds of reforms, this idea has never come forward. I guess the reason that it did not is that many in society are unable to save.

• (1030)

I see some real discrepancies. For instance, only 14 per cent of tax filers with incomes between \$10,000 and \$20,000 can make RRSP contributions. How will these people be able to make the savings that are requested? There are other discrepancies as well: 70 per cent of those with incomes above \$80,000 contribute to RRSPs.

How can people who earn lower incomes prepare for potential catastrophic events?

Mrs. Ablonczy: Mr. Speaker, I am not surprised the idea has never come forward in Liberal meetings. It takes leadership to provide new ideas and that is exactly what is missing from the government.

I wish the member had listened to my speech. It would have helped her a great deal. In the speech I noted that workers earning only \$1,000 a month, which is the working poor, by investing their UI and CPP forced contributions in RPSs, would retire under the plan with \$3,432 per month before tax. That is what will benefit the poor. No wonder they have no ability to save now. They are forced to pay these moneys to the government, which are mismanaged and poured down the drain. They have nothing left to save.

Why not let them keep their money and save it for this kind of return? It would be a tremendous advantage to the working poor. I believe the member will see that and support it if she examines the proposal objectively.

Mr. Dick Harris (Prince George—Bulkley Valley, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I sat here in utter amazement as I listened to the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell ask how people were going to squirrel money away when they do not have any money.

That Liberal member could have answered his own question. He knows very well that over 60 per cent of the income of average working middle class Canadians is being paid out in taxes of all forms. It was a predecessor Liberal government that started the deficit and debt spending which was carried on by the Tory Party. Now we have almost a \$500 billion debt and we are servicing that debt with about a \$45 billion interest payment. If

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the incompetence of the Liberal Party back in the mid-seventies had not started this downward slide, Canadian taxpayers would have money left in their paycheques to provide for their own personal security.

It goes back to what we have been saying. It is not fiscally responsible MPs like the Reformers that are the biggest threat to social programs. It is the incompetence of previous governments and the high taxes we pay in the country.

The Deputy Speaker: I am not sure those remarks were aimed at the member who was speaking.

Ms. Susan Whelan (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to debate the hon. member's motion. The hon. member says our social security programs are failing. I fail to see how the hon. member arrived at that conclusion.

Before we began reviewing our social security system we heard from Canadians loud and clear. They wanted us to retain these programs, programs that are interwoven into the social fabric of Canada. That hardly suggests failure. It does not mean, however, that Canadians thought we should just leave them as is.

The government recognized social security programs have served us well for many years but that it was time for an overhaul. It was time to make them relative to the needs of the population of the 1990s. That is why we undertook, with the support of the majority of Canadians, the first step in the process of social security reform.

Hon. members are well aware that we carried out massive consultations across the country. The Minister of Human Resources Development and the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development listened to the views of Canadians from all walks of life. More than 600 groups expressed their opinions on social security reform.

• (1035)

To break it down briefly for hon. members, 20,000 Canadians took part in more than 200 town hall meetings held by MPs from all parties. More than 40,000 people completed and returned social security reform workbooks. We held a series of seminars where there was broad public discussion in 25 communities across the nation. The Minister of Human Resources Development has received more than 3,000 letters from citizens expressing their views on social security reform. Over 7,000 people have accessed the minister's Internet bulletin board on social security reform and more than 35,000 people have called the social security reform hotline to request information or material.

Hon. members will also recall that some of the hearings were rambunctious affairs, to say the least. While it is true that those who voice strong opinions may indicate disagreement with some program policy, one thing it certainly does not indicate is