

Government Orders

payments over the period from 1986-87 to 1994-95 will total, as I said earlier, an incredible \$31 billion.

Mr. Speaker, one wonders what happened to the Minister of Finance, because in 1982, he objected strenuously to cutbacks in EPF transfers, saying that the federal government should not reduce the deficit at the expense of the provinces. On March 24, 1982 he said in this House that cuts in EPF transfers "could have disastrous effects on the universities and on the colleges, on the hospital funding and on the operations of the hospitals. Let us not make hospitals, universities and colleges a battleground between the federal government and the provincial governments."

• (1220)

How can the Minister of Finance show up in the House to defend this bill which clearly contradicts what he said not so long ago? Cuts undermine the Canadian health care system just the demand for these services is growing because of our aging population and the high cost of high technology medical equipment.

Once again, the Prime Minister will go back on what he said on post-secondary education. He promised high quality education for young Canadians. His about-turn makes a mockery of the national education task force he set up. As you probably remember, Mr. Speaker, at the Conservatives' general council meeting held on August 25, 1989 in Ottawa, the Prime Minister said this: "Our government will support its fair share of the burden to make sure Canadians get a high quality education enabling them to face international challenges."

Mr. Speaker, we wonder whether the government seriously intends to honour not only the commitments it made in 1982 when it talked about cutbacks and their effects on provinces, students and sick people but also the promises made by the Prime Minister as recently as August 1989.

The Canada Assistance Plan will also suffer drastic cuts under this budget. Established in 1966, it is the cornerstone of the Canadian social assistance program. Under this Plan, the federal and provincial governments each pay half the costs of social assistance and essential goods and services such as food, housing, clothing, public utilities and household items. Social assistance also includes dental care for the poor, aid for the disabled, help for abused children in foster homes and help for children in low-income families. These are areas that will be cut by the government, which tells us that these

cuts are essential to balance our country's economic affairs.

Mr. Speaker, Canadians will have to decide whether this is a fair way to deal with the federal government's problem.

The 1989 budget speech defended the clawback of family allowances and old age pensions on the pretext that the primary purpose of social assistance is to help those who need it and not those with high incomes. Now the measures taken in the 1990 Budget attack the poorest Canadians, because the poor live in all provinces of Canada. We know that figures for 1987, the latest available, show that 49 per cent of poor families and 54.9 per cent of poor individuals live in the provinces of Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta. We must also remember that welfare payments are not always enough to enable families to escape poverty. They are just enough to survive on. And that is no doubt why British Columbia and Ontario announced after the Budget was tabled that they would challenge the CAP cuts in court. Alberta supports the action taken by these two provinces.

We know that the government wanted to try to give the impression that it was continuing to help the most disadvantaged provinces by attacking the poor in Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia. But I think that Canadians can easily understand that it is the beginning. In the same way that the government last year in the 1989 Budget wanted to claw back family allowances and old age pension benefits for some high-income individuals, it is the beginning of the end of the commitment the federal government has had for years to help the needy throughout Canada.

[English]

I listened, with a lot of interest, to my colleague the Minister of State for Finance, especially when he talked about the coherent and global plan that the government had to deal with the problems it encountered when it came to office in 1984. I can only say that it takes a great deal of courage to stand in this House and to talk about what has gone on over the last six years as being part of any coherent activity.

For the record, when the Conservative government came to power in 1984, at the end of that fiscal year, in the spring of 1985, the public debt was at \$200 billion. The public debt at the end of this fiscal year will be at