

Government Orders

● (1100)

The bill does one thing for Canadians. It points out the enormous complexity of the legislation and administration of our social programs. This complexity catches Canadians in many ways and causes their lives to be a nightmare of forms, deadlines, red tape, information exchanges, letters, phone calls and all things that go along with an enormous state bureaucracy that is supposed to look after us but in fact does not do it very well.

After one year in office the Liberal answer to the need to address the substantive dysfunction of a lot of our social programs, and the concern that the services to Canadians are eroding and cannot be sustained, is to bring forth a bit of housekeeping legislation. That is simply not good enough for Canadians. We need to be serious about addressing our social programs.

I will talk about that in a moment but first I will address the concern about confidentiality. Canadians want to see some common sense in this area. For example, if a non-citizen, someone from another country, comes to Canada, decides to stay for reasons we can certainly well understand and makes applications as a refugee, that the individual is on welfare or some other social program cannot be disclosed to Canadians trying to evaluate which people should be allowed to come to our country and be accepted as citizens to help build our nation.

There are many areas where the concern about confidentiality interferes with efficient, effective and common sense administration of our own system. For example, if someone applies for benefits often it cannot be disclosed in other jurisdictions or to administrators of other programs. That is one of the reasons we have abuse, inefficiency and overlap.

We need to be very sensible when we address this area and not go overboard by suggesting that nobody, especially the system that is paying the bills, has a right to know what individual Canadians are receiving in benefits.

The real issue is not that we need a little tinkering with our programs, a little housekeeping legislation from time to time to try to smooth the bureaucratic wheels. As we know these programs are in far deeper trouble than that. What is really needed is a substantial review and reform of our income security programs and our social programs and that is what we are not receiving from the government.

The review taking place presently totally ignores all the programs of most concern to seniors. It totally ignores CPP. It totally ignores old age security. It totally ignores health care. Government says this is coming. Our social system is just that. It is a system. All these programs are interrelated. If changes are made to program *a* it will impact on programs *b*, *c* and *d*. That is the way it works. To do this piecemeal, to look at one program,

then maybe another and a couple of years down the road we will get around to looking at the rest, is not the way to look in a coherent, effective and clear manner at how social programs should be administered.

● (1105)

A lot of people refer to the old saying: if it ain't broke don't fix it. Why are we looking at social programs? Why has the government brought in the review of social programs in Canada? It is fairly clear to everyone in the House and certainly to most Canadians why it is necessary. Although these programs are barely 30 years old, they are already unsustainable financially. They are not paying their own way. The cost of these programs is growing astronomically year by year and, worst of all, they have been largely financed on the backs of our children.

The bill for much of the spending on these programs which are so nice for us today is being handed to our children tomorrow. We are mortgaging our future so that we can have these programs. How long have we even had them? We have had them for 30 years. For 30 years we have impoverished our country and we are impoverishing our children so that we can have enormous benefits and an enormous bureaucracy to administer them. What have we accomplished? Very little as far as the long term benefit to the country is concerned.

Someone needs to stand and say this and do something about it. Canadians are looking to the government for leadership and for a good, common sense grappling with the issues facing us not just today but in the future. We do not see that happening.

We have a government that is continuing to say mortgaging our country to the tune of \$100 billion during its term in office is okay. It will celebrate if that is all it does: if it only puts us in the hole by \$25 billion a year it has done a great job for us! Canadians will beg to differ and certainly our children will beg to differ.

Seniors are at risk unless something is done. This is why many seniors are dependent upon pension benefits they have counted on to sustain them in their retirement years. It is very clear from anybody looking at these programs that in coming years our seniors will be sadly disappointed.

In just 15 short years we will have 40 per cent more retired Canadians than we have today. That is a huge increase. These Canadians will be looking for old age security payments. They will be looking for Canada pension plan payments. They will be looking to the health care system to make sure that their increased medical needs are covered and looked after.

Yet what is happening? These programs are costing more and more money. They are increasing the debt burden on our country