

*Time Allocation*

• (1150)

The national capital plays a major part in the development of a system of national values and an awareness of the fact that being Canadian has a symbolic importance beyond where we were born or where we happen to live. I think we should all be concerned, whatever side we are on, when the government and its ministers try to excuse the inability of the government to manage its finances by somehow criticizing or dumping on one region of the country, especially when that region, more than others, in a way embodies the identity of the nation. I think it is very important that those institutions that are centred on the national capital continue to play that role.

Even as the President of the Treasury Board was standing in the House of Commons on Friday talking about what he was going to cut, the Prime Minister of Canada was in Chambly, Quebec, where there is a by-election by some coincidence going on, talking about how he was spending, about what he was doing to buy votes in that area. I suggest that the government start to look at its own iniquitous practice of trying to buy votes before it starts to talk about the national capital region being some kind of privileged area.

On the matter of time allocation on this bill, I think the minister has also said some things that bear examination. He has talked about the effort on this side of the House to protect the wealthy. I hardly think that asking the House of Commons to take the time to consider the most important social policy change in a generation in this country should be interpreted merely as trying to protect the wealthy.

We have built, for better or for worse, a series of programs in this country based on the assumption that universality should be the guiding principle. We have done that not just with respect to our family allowances and old age pensions, although those are important. We have also done it with our educational system. We have done it as well with our medical aid system. We have accepted the idea that Canadians, whatever their economic situation, should share a common basis of well-being based on being Canadian, whether they are rich or poor, whether they live in Ottawa, Orillia, Peace River or Halifax. Wherever they live, whatever their income, Canadians are entitled to a common basis of social programs in this country.

The government is tearing down national institutions. It is going across the country encouraging criticism of the national capital. It is underfunding the National Arts Centre and its ministers say we should not even call these institutions national because it offends some separatists in Quebec, that we should call them Canadian rather than national. While the government is tearing these things down it is tearing down the basic social concept, the contract whereby we live together in this country, and it is saying, "You can only have a few hours to debate it".

The clawback should not even be in an income tax amendment bill. If the clawback is going to be introduced it should be done as part of social policy change. There should have been a discussion paper following up the one that was issued by the minister of health in 1985 in which the minister of Health at the time, now the minister of energy, said that to tax back old age pensions would be unfair and unacceptable. He said at the same time that it might not be unfair with family allowances. We could argue about that, but he specifically mentioned that the old age pension should be protected.

What happened to the discussion paper? It went to a parliamentary committee, it was studied, it died. There was no further discussion, no more policy papers, no more indication that the government was considering introducing the most significant social policy change in a generation. None of that was done.

Instead the government, and the Prime Minister in particular, went around during the election campaign and said, "Social programs, especially for the elderly, will not be diminished. They will be improved". And with the very first budget after the election we had the clawback introduced. Did he tell his mother, I wonder.

I am sure all Canadians are disgusted at the memory of the Prime Minister of Canada parading his own mother on to an election platform as an example of his good faith to the seniors of Canada. Four months later the Minister of Finance gets up and says he is going to tax back Mrs. Mulroney's old age pension. Why was that not put before the people during the election campaign? Why is it that now, four days before we are to adjourn for Christmas, in an Income Tax Act amendment bill, which has all kinds of things in it from the budget, which the Department of Finance itself tried to amend in committee and all of its amendments were out of order, we have