

Government Orders

● (1150)

Mr. Breikreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Ref.): They would not even let them co-chair the proceedings.

Mr. Solberg: The government would not even let them co-chair the proceedings, Mr. Speaker, as my hon. friend points out.

Suffice it to say there are many problems with the green paper. It has been roundly criticized by the media, by the provinces, and by the many special interest groups that were funded by the government to come and appear before them but by Canadians themselves.

Reform's zero-three program really led the way. Lately we have had proposals from Tom Courchene who actually appeared before the committee. The hon. member from Winnipeg across the way was there when he appeared. He made an excellent presentation. I guess he did not find any of his proposals in the green paper so he felt it was necessary to bring out his own. It is now in the arena of public debate. Hopefully the government will see fit to include it in its area of debate as well and will consider some of Mr. Courchene's ideas.

The government has another problem. We are rapidly approaching the end of 1994. It has delayed again the time when it will call for the reporting deadline on this issue to February 6, 1995. We have moved from getting this into legislation this fall. Possibly when we consider the time it takes to draft legislation and for it to pass through various readings in the House and committee, it is quite conceivable that it will be well into 1996 before it actually becomes legislation, if that is what the government decides to do.

It will probably be a year, perhaps a year and a half, before the next election if the government holds an election within four years. That concerns me. It is a well known fact that governments very often fail at the last moment, at the critical point, when they are faced with going before the electorate, particularly when they are talking about making deep cuts to something that Canadians value like social programs.

I am concerned about that. This issue is inextricably intertwined with the whole issue of fiscal responsibility and the huge problems we face because of overspending by this Liberal government and the Conservative governments that went before.

We have a deficit of \$40 billion. We have a debt approaching \$535 billion. Soon international lenders are going to get fed up.

They are going to say that they have had enough and want to find a place where their investment will be safe.

I am concerned the government across the way has not realized that. It does not understand the urgency. While the finance minister may realize it, I think the Prime Minister has failed to grasp it, as has the human resources development minister.

I urge the government to come to grips with the seriousness of the situation, to take another look at its social program reform and to move ahead with serious cuts in the very near future for the sake of all Canadians.

Mr. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I paid attention to the hon. member's speech.

I thought we were debating the redesign of the ISP. I want to ask the hon. member if he has any opinions on some concrete examples that would improve services for seniors because this is what the bill is about.

For example, it will only take half a day to process a simple OAS application which now takes around seven days to do. Processing time for an application for Canada pension plan benefits will drop from 13 days to one day. Telephone service will be improved so that 97 per cent of all telephone calls will get answered. Today only about 50 per cent get answered. Seniors will be able to make changes to information such as change of address over the telephone using a touch tone system. For clients who prefer personal service or who do not have a touch tone phone, staff will be available to answer their questions quickly.

● (1155)

These are real, positive changes that have an impact on the lives of seniors on an every day basis. The hon. member should be addressing issues that we deal with in this bill. However he has taken the opportunity to expand and talk about the social security review. The reality is that the government has been the first one in a long time that has had the courage to face up to some very difficult challenges and choices we have to make as a nation.

Thirteen per cent of the people in Canada are unemployed for a year or longer. Long term unemployment has increased three times since 1976. When 40 per cent of these people are faced with structural unemployment and 30 per cent of Canadians have problems with literacy and numeracy skills, one has to admit we have to move toward building a better and more efficient social security system that; first, helps Canadians get jobs and keep jobs; second, would help the most vulnerable and; third, is sustainable.