

Government Orders

• (1635)

Many Canadians in health departments and in social services, social development and welfare departments have worked hard to try and hone the current system this nation has. Over the years I have had the opportunity of being involved in a number of those reviews and studies.

The point that I want to make in my few moments here today is with regard to what I see as the objectives of the Reform Party of Canada and how we want to place ourselves in this review and reform that will happen.

I say to the hon. member for London—Middlesex who was talking a little earlier about having an inside track on reform, I hope we approach the reform of the social service system on a broader basis so that all Canadians and all sides of this House of Commons have input into the new changes which will come about during the first or second term of the 35th Parliament. Not just the government, not just the Liberal Party, not in a partisan way but on a broader basis.

As the Reform Party we must do two things. First of all, we have a basic philosophic approach to social programs and those programs meeting the needs of Canadians. I am sure all of us have heard that in this assembly. We believe we should help those in need, that no Canadian should suffer from a lack of food, clothing, shelter and health care, that those basic four requirements should be available to every Canadian. We believe it should be there.

However we also say that because of the current circumstances where we are some \$500 billion in accumulated debt, that the current track of the Liberal government as is set out in its program whereby the object is to bring the deficit down to 3 per cent of the GDP, even reaching that target we well recognize that in the first year, if we reach that target in 1994–95, there will still be a \$25 billion deficit to accumulate on the debt. If we looked just at that figure over the next four years we would add another \$100 billion to the \$500 billion.

What does that do in terms of the tax dollar? Right now, 32 cents out of every tax dollar goes to pay interest costs. If we continue to build up the accumulated debt, as some economists and some of those who have researched this very well have indicated, if we continue on that type of a spending pattern, by the end of the century we will end up paying 50 cents of every one of our revenue dollars toward interest costs. The question then is: How much does that leave to meet those basic needs we think are so important, the food, the clothing, the shelter and health care for Canadians?

We cannot run the country on 50-cent dollars. It is impossible to do that kind of thing. We have to come to grips with it.

With respect to the upcoming budget, in the informal discussions that are going on not just in this assembly but in discussions in other committees and in talking informally with government members and those who are trying to examine the budget deficit that is coming up, the forecast is that we most likely will have a deficit in the 1994–95 budget of \$38 billion to \$39 billion. So we can imagine how that is going to erode and eat away our capability as legislators to meet our social objectives. That has to be part of the discussion when we look at reform.

It will not be the ideal that we come up with. We have to work within the financial constraints we are facing. Certainly I would recommend to the government in this reform that we must then look at the definition of those in need.

There are a couple of examples. During our campaign period we talked about those on old age assistance. At the present time some \$14.4 billion are allocated across this country in the current year. In the former fiscal year it was about the same amount of money. Those dollars, \$14.4 billion, are allocated to those persons receiving old age assistance.

• (1640)

What we are saying as Reformers is an example of targeting of programs. Those seniors getting a family income of \$54,000 or more—we feel that is adequate for the senior to live on—if we were able to on a graduated basis maybe to \$70,000 of income, reduce their old age assistance using a formula we could take out of expenditure in that old age assistance program some \$3.4 billion. That amount could go toward reducing the deficit. Rather than a \$38 billion or \$39 billion deficit that adjustment in program may bring it down to \$35 billion or \$36 billion. That is the kind of thing we have to do.

We have to look at the whole health care program. I know the question of user fees is tossed around by the various provinces. I come from the province of Alberta which is seriously looking at user fees. I know the government has said it will not do that but it is not because it wants to punish someone or take something away, but there is a capability during these difficult economic times for people to be able to pay for part of the service.

It is also believed there may be a deterrent in that those who really do not need the health care service will not visit the doctor as often as they are presently doing. We have to look at the case of user fees as well in this review and this reform.

I could use other examples with regard to targeting of programs. Under the circumstances I believe those terms of reference must be considered in this reform. This is not a period where we have a lot of money, where we can say to Canadians that everybody is going to have a share of the government pie or the revenue. We are not at that period of time in our history as legislators and we have to recognize that. We have a major