

Government Orders

Hon. Gilles Loiselle (Minister of State (Finance)): Madam Speaker, I would like to say that the greatest threat to the people the hon. member was referring to would be for us to run away from a very difficult responsibility, which is to bring the deficit and the debt down. Otherwise it is our very capacity to deal with our programs and to support our programs on a continuing basis that will be threatened.

It is all very nice to live in a land where these problems do not arise when you have access to any amount of money. We are dealing with a very precise situation where Canadians are contributing a huge amount of money to our programs. They want us to deal, and I am sure that every member in this House would like us to deal in a responsible way with the finances of this country and this is what we are doing. We are cutting and trying to make savings where we are spending.

The government, of course, spends in areas which are always of great importance. I do not deny that we do not live in an ideal world. We are trying to manage the finances properly and protect the capacity of the government. If we do not do that, in a few years time it will not be what the hon. member called clawback; it will be the disappearance of these programs. Money does not grow on trees. We have to work in a responsible way to make sure that these programs are preserved because they are important.

Ms. Langan: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the minister for commenting. I remind him that the term clawback is a term created and put forward by the finance minister, not by this hon. member.

The hon. minister says that the responsibility of the government is to reduce the deficit so that we can continue to have social programs. I suggest that if this government is serious about reducing the deficit, why are we reducing the deficit on the backs of seniors, on the backs of parents and on the backs of children in this country? Don't give me the argument that it is to protect our children's future. What about the present? Starve me today so I can live well tomorrow? Come on.

What this government needs to do is talk about taxing corporate Canada fairly. If we took all of those deferred taxes and put them in the coffers of the government, we would not have to tax from kids and we would not have

to tax from pensioners, like he is proposing. What about doing something about the artificially high Canadian dollar or the interest rates in this country? If we could get the finance minister to do something about the interest rates in this country, we could take care of that billion dollars that this clawback is going to grab for the government.

Ms. Mary Clancy (Halifax): Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak on this bill and to speak on the issue of fairness. There has been a lot of back and forth about the provisions of the bill and the clawback and whether or not the government is Robin Hood or the Sheriff of Nottingham.

The question that we must deal with is strictly one of whether or not governments are supposed to be fair to the people they govern. The answer with regard to this bill, and with all due deference to the hon. minister opposite, is no. The answer is no.

We look at this bill and we see that those families which earn in excess of \$50,000 a year will be clawed back on their old age pension and on their family allowance.

First of all, I am astounded by the insinuations of some hon. members opposite that \$50,000 a year creates the aura of riches. If we are talking about a family of four or five, if we are even talking about two senior citizens with a pensionable income of \$50,100 a year, we are not talking riches. I come from, admittedly the poorest region of the country, so there are not a whole lot of people in my region who fall into this category. Even I being from the Atlantic region know that \$50,000 spread across the average Canadian family is not a huge amount of money.

In regard to the old age pension, many of the people who are going to be clawed back on their old age pension are not receiving it as some gratuitous frill. This old age pension was something that many of them contributed to in the beginning and middle years of their working lives, because this pension was a contributory pension. Consequently, when these people, as most of our senior citizens do, planned for their retirement years, they included at least in a ball park way the old age pension as part of the funds they would have in their retirement years and used them in planning how they would spend those years. What they are dealing with is a breach of trust by the government and a loss of income.