

*Private Members' Business*

tion, and four for specific information. The question we want to ask never falls in the proposed categories.

This is not to mention the fact that many elderly do not even have a touch-tone telephone. These people, and those who will not have managed to get an answer, will be able to talk to an agent. But how long will they have to wait? The staff of people manning the phones has been cut by nearly 50 per cent. And do you think the government bothered to consult senior citizens, the group concerned here, or their associations or federations? Certainly not! They did not consult seniors to find out whether the system met their needs.

Liberal members will tell us that the system will provide faster and more efficient service. We know that the new system will get on a lot of people's nerves. Using speed and efficiency as an excuse, the Liberal government will manage to cut down on the amount of money paid to seniors, since many seniors will give up trying to claim what they are entitled to, because it is so hard to get the information they need.

Misinformation of its senior clients as a result of a dehumanized system will help the Liberals save money at the expense of seniors, who did not file the requisite applications or were unable to use this so-called speedy and effective system correctly. Effective for whom?

Many pensioners will forgo their right to the guaranteed income supplement, for instance, because of lack of information. The Liberal government prefers to dehumanize the system and not inform to its senior clients, so that seniors themselves will give up on the service. I think this is sufficient proof that the Liberal government is ruthless. Instead of attacking seniors, instead of reducing their tax credit or changing the way they receive services, the government should pull up its socks and cut where cuts are really necessary.

Family trusts, for instance. We talked about these in the House today during Question Period, to show how the Liberals caved in to pressure by lobbyists who wanted to maintain family trusts. These family trusts make it possible for rich families to put billions of dollars in a tax shelter. We know these trusts contain at least \$100 billion, and we know who benefits.

• (1800)

Is cutting money for seniors and the unemployed and maintaining family trusts the kind of equity the Liberals had in mind? A tax of only 20 per cent on the \$100 billion in family trusts would mean \$20 billion, and that kind of measure is worthwhile, to reduce the deficit.

Abolishing the many tax shelters and loopholes in corporate tax would also give the government a chance to show it is serious about attacking the deficit. Meanwhile, cutting fat in the public service and getting rid of duplication would raise several more billion.

We should also get rid of historic institutions that are symbolic and have become too costly for a country like Canada, such as the Senate, on which the government wastes \$500 million annually, and the Governor General, the Lieutenant-Governors and the Queen. We also have 90,000 Canadian corporations that do not pay a cent of income tax, and hundreds of millionaires who paid less than \$100 in taxes last year. They should also contribute towards putting Canada's finances back on track, instead of leaving this to our seniors and unemployed.

There are many other measures I could suggest, if I had more time. To paraphrase the Bible: The government giveth and the government taketh away. It takes money from us all and gives only to a chosen few.

Before we make cuts in the Old Age Security Program or the Canada Pension Plan, we have to remember that the government made some moral commitments when it created these two programs. The OAS Program was built with the sweat of our senior citizens. In 1952, when this program was introduced, a majority of 81 per cent of MPs decided that this program would be universal, that is to say that it would be paid to everyone reaching the age of eligibility, regardless of their income.

When it started, 41 years ago, the OAS Program was being financed by a special tax called Old Age Security Tax. The government collected this tax with the personal income tax, the corporate income tax and the sales tax. The revenues were transferred to a special account, the Old Age Security Fund.

In 1972, as part of a fiscal reform, the Old Age Security Tax was integrated with the general tax. In 1975, the Old Age Security Fund was transferred to the Consolidated Revenue Fund. Since then, we have all forgotten that people had paid all their lives into this program, hoping to receive payments in their older years. They planned their retirement with that money in mind and, despite the heartless people across the floor, private pension plans negotiated with employers took this into consideration. The rate of taxation for this program which was 2 per cent in 1952 had risen to 4 per cent in 1972 and, according to established taxation policies, higher income earners have paid proportionally more into the plan.

This is why the decision taken in 1989 to tax-back the OAS payments of senior citizens having an income over \$50,000 outraged those who had contributed to the program, in good faith, for almost 40 years.

• (1805)

Taxpayers who have been paying and are still paying specific and visible taxes in preparation for their retirement feel that they are entitled to get them back. Old age pension is not a privilege nor a handout, it is the repayment of a debt society owes them.

People over 65 are far from being a privileged and rich group. Forty per cent of them are eligible to receive the guaranteed income supplement which keeps them at the poverty level. For 72 per cent of female seniors and 50 per cent of male seniors,