

*Government Orders*

in the next federal budget and that we could not go on spending as much money as we have been spending in this country.

Once the social program review was launched there were delays. There were problems right off the bat. There were patronage appointments made to the task force, people being paid big per diems. More delays came along. The thing floundered.

People really wanted to see the social program review succeed. Canadians have been talking about the need for social program review for 10, 12, 15 years and they want this government to succeed. They want it to do well because they know that their interests are at stake. They grew concerned and I would argue that those concerns continue to grow today.

Not only was this program review put on hold continually much to the chagrin of Canadians, but on the eve of the release of the long awaited green paper there was a revelation in the *Toronto Star* that the social program reform was going to include big cuts, \$7.5 billion worth, even though the government had given Canadians the impression that they would be consulted in this before any types of cuts were actually considered.

On the other hand, I am certain there was a printing mistake. When the green paper was released there were no figures at all in it. In other words, Canadians were being asked to choose among all these different programs without knowing how much they would cost and what the costs of the various alternatives were. Obviously that was a mistake, a printing mistake I am certain, because no government would ever put forward a list of proposals without having something so critical in it as the cost of the actual programs.

• (1145)

Every day Canadians make decisions on all kinds of issues. Chief among them I can guarantee is how much they cost, because they know they have to live within their means. Somehow this escapes the government.

Also missing from the various options were many of the options put before the government during the period that led up to the actual presentation of the document in the House. I sat in on some of the HRD meetings and heard some of the presentations that were given. I remember sitting in a committee meeting suggesting that the studies and inquiries from past royal commissions should become part of the official body of information that the government refers to when it is considering the options.

I mentioned specifically the Forget commission report. It talked for instance about unemployment insurance and returning it to the employers and the employees, the people who fund it. That was rejected by the committee because the Liberal majority voted against it for reasons that escape me. There were members who spoke in favour of it. When the whip was cracked they all voted against the proposal. I invite the hon. parliamentary secretary to review the record.

Not all of the various options are in the paper. That is unfortunate because Canadians should have a chance to look at some of the other options that were put before the committee.

Initially this document was put forward as an action plan. That was the wording of the motion. It said—I think on January 31—that the government would be tabling an action plan in the days and weeks to come. Somehow over the course of the last several months the action plan became watered down and diluted to the point where it became a discussion paper.

In other words the minister who has the power to call to heel armies of bureaucrats and all kinds of minions to gather all the wisdom in the country about social policy reform, after all that time, money and the thousands of hours that were spent on it, brought forward a little green pamphlet with scarcely any action at all or any call for action, but merely a few of the options of the many that were discussed. That was a real shame.

We are now in a situation in which other groups around the country have come forward and said: "We have some ideas that the government for some reason did not want to consider".

I point to the Kierans-Robson report from the C.D. Howe Institute in which not only did they come out with options, but they came out with costs. They said: "We will tell you how much money we are going to cut from some of these areas".

These are not what I am suggesting, but they should be in the debate. On the topic of unemployment insurance they suggest that unemployment insurance should be converted into true insurance; there should be a proposal to eliminate regional differences in qualifying periods and benefits and we should eliminate all regional and non-insurance components. The savings from that would be \$5.5 billion. They were not ashamed to suggest there would be some savings there.

Under the Canada assistance plan they suggested that we eliminate and divert \$2.5 billion to a new child tax credit to low income households. The total savings on that would be \$4.9 billion.

They talked about health care, which is something the government has been reluctant to discuss, or at least they are having trouble getting the provinces to come to the table. At this very moment the Prime Minister is delivering a speech to an empty assembly of people called for the health care forum. Not only were the health care ministers from across the country invited and did not show up, but the premiers were invited by the Prime Minister himself. They refused to come for two reasons: first, they know that under the Constitution this is their jurisdiction; second, they resent that although they are the senior partners in this arrangement and they pay the lion's share of the cost for health care—almost double what the federal government pays—the federal government is attempting to set the agenda. It has made a grave error in this. There are other areas including social program reform, GST reform and interprovincial trade barriers where it has made the same errors.