

that has come before the House in all the time he has been here. However, he supported it, I am not clear why, when it first went through. He also supported the unemployment insurance changes which he now intends to condemn because he feels they are cruel and unjust.

Let me make a few more general points before I get into specifics. It needs to be put on the record that there is no country in the western industrialized world where the senior citizens are better looked after than they are in Canada, bar none.

An hon. Member: Tell that to the senior citizens.

Mr. Martin: This is something of which this government, Canadian citizens and the Canadian community at large can, indeed, be extremely proud.

An hon. Member: Tell that to your people in Scarborough during the next election campaign.

Mr. Martin: I will be delighted to tell that to the people of Scarborough West, Mr. Speaker. I have a good number of senior citizen's homes in my riding and I continually have a good deal of interaction with them. Yes, there are a number of things senior citizens would like to see done to add to the benefits in existence today, and that goes without saying. But the senior citizens are very supportive of government programs that exist today in all kinds of areas, including senior citizens' housing, old age pensions, the Canada Pension Plan, disability plans, the New Horizons program, etc., etc., etc. In the past ten years or so this Liberal government has moved the percentage of the federal budget devoted to social programs, administered largely through the Department of National Health and Welfare, from 12 per cent of expenditures to 33 per cent, and that is almost a three-fold increase in percentage terms, to say nothing of what these increases really mean in terms of actual dollars.

At the same time, to show the kind of commitment Canadians have through their elected government, a government that still has the majority support of all Canadians across this country, and will continue to have after the next election, during the same period expenditures on national defence have moved down from about 25 per cent of the budget to about 12 per cent, or roughly one half in proportion to the total budget. That is the commitment of this government and that is the commitment of Canadians who will continue to elect the Liberal party to form the government of this country.

The important thing, which has been mentioned earlier, is that if the program which is being talked about was to be put forward simply for those in need between 60 and 65 years of age, this would cost somewhere in the area of \$600 million. Let us not talk about things that have been taken out. This was not something taken out of the legislation. When the legislation was put in, it was to benefit a group in addition to the senior citizens over 65. One can argue that the age should come down to 55, 50 or even 45, but let us keep things in context. If we include only those who are in need, my under-

standing is that the cost would be somewhere in the area of \$600 million, as I have said.

It is my understanding that one of the things that could be looked at and which is receiving some consideration, is a tie-over period to help those senior citizens who suddenly find themselves without this pension, giving them a six months' lead in time in order to adjust to whatever other benefit plans may be available to them. This is something that is currently receiving consideration and hopefully will be done.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): We will be hearing about this during the election campaign, no doubt.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, I never object to hearing the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) speak in support of senior citizens, the disabled and those less fortunate in this country, because he is very consistent. He continually speaks on their behalf and I think that is to his credit. I know he does not always tie the dollars in, but at least he is consistent. But in the official opposition we see this incredible flip-flop policy. I only wish the hon. member for York-Simcoe and the hon. Leader of the Opposition had been here for the full debate this afternoon, because it would have been interesting to see how they intend to handle the situation once they have moved outside this chamber.

Mr. Clark: I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Since attention has been drawn to my presence during the debate, I should like to point out to the hon. member, not simply the fact that he has been misrepresenting the facts, probably with some deliberateness, as was pointed out by my colleague the hon. member for Hamilton West (Mr. Alexander), but also that when he speaks about the presence or absence of front bench members and party leaders he should ask where is his leader, where are his ministers, and where is his minister at this time when we are dealing with a matter that is so fundamentally associated with social justice in this country.

Some hon. Members: Order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): Order, please.

Mr. Clark: When will he come to the point of telling the House of Commons what the government intends to do to ensure that—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): Order, please. I would suggest to the hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) that this is not a point of order but rather a matter for debate.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, I resent very strongly, and deny, any suggestion that I am attempting deliberately to mislead anybody. I do not think any hon. member of this House in any party whatever would attempt to do that. Perhaps that remark will be withdrawn on further reflection by the hon. Leader of the Opposition. As far as the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) is concerned, she just returned from outside the country about ten minutes before the debate began. My understanding is that the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) is taking part in some very important conferences with the leader