

features of our social programs. His third point concerned my reiterating the importance for the provinces to redistribute the money to needy mothers or families. Of course, the House can be sure that I will do everything I can to achieve that and I have sufficient confidence in the fact that my provincial colleagues are good politicians and could do it at no cost at all. That will give them good publicity and it will not cost them anything since the federal treasury will pay for this program on behalf of all Canadians. I am not prepared to ask all members to start submitting petitions to provincial ministers!

The fourth point was about the consumer price index.

[*English*]

I will not go into too many details regarding the consumer price index, but I want to make it quite clear that as far as I am concerned the new consumer price index will serve the clients of my department better. That is the attitude I would take if proposals like this came before cabinet. The new index is made up of an updated basket of goods. It includes the 1974 basket instead of the old 1967 basket to bring us closer to reality. It covers all family sizes rather than just two to six person families, as does the current one. It covers all income groups rather than just the \$7,000 to \$21,000 group referred to by the current consumer price index. In other words, all families earning less than \$7,000 are now included. That will give a much better reflection of the needs of low income families. The new consumer price index covers more cities and more expenditure items.

All that being said, the net result is a relative decrease in the importance of the food index. It has declined from 24.8 per cent to 21.5 per cent of the consumer price index. By the same token, the importance of other items such as housing has increased. The housing factor has increased from 31.4 per cent to 34.5 per cent of the consumer price index. That part of the index will be important in the budgets of the families we are trying to help with this program.

With regard to the letter from the chairman of the Human Rights Commission, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre referred in his question to the treatment of married mothers compared with the treatment of common law situations in the income tax system. At the outset I would like to say that I do not think this bill will correct everything that is wrong in the system.

Having said that and protected myself from financial specialists, I want to say as Minister of National Health and Welfare and not as the former minister of national revenue that as far as I know common law situations have not been recognized by the income tax system. People living in common law situations usually have not enjoyed all the tax privileges offered to dependent spouses.

● (2102)

This time the common law situation is not viewed as it was before, and this legislation will permit in some cases mothers who are living in a common law situation to benefit from the credit, in contrast to families where the partners make good

money. That is pretty theoretical, but if that is what the hon. member meant, it is theoretically possible.

Let me go back now to marital status as the criterion of eventual discrimination. I want to reiterate that the point raised by the chairman of the Human Rights Commission is not at all valid, so far as I can see. The married mother declares both incomes, or whatever income exists. The separated mother who has a legal separation declares her income, if any, from whatever source, as defined under net income in the income tax form, and will also declare the alimony, if there is any, or child payments. The situation is the same for divorced mothers. In the case of a de facto separation which is not legal—

[*Translation*]

—in the case of separations which are not legally recognized but which are actual separations, the mother is considered as sole parent and reports her sources of income. In the case of unmarried mothers, the woman of course reports her income once again whatever may be the source. Finally I do not see any case of discrimination based on marital status. The parents, when both are there, must report their income because the needs of the children must be determined and whether the woman is married or receives an alimony or is unmarried, as long as the family unit not within the fiscal meaning of the term, but as far as family allowances are concerned as long as the family unit does not have necessary earnings, the mother will receive a cheque. One might say that it is discrimination against men, but I am sure that was not the point which the commissioner wanted to make. I think that the commissioner was referring—and his letter is not quite clear in that respect to problems more especially identified by several feminist organizations a few years ago when the Carter commission was widely discussed. A point income tax or point returns were then mentioned. The Canadian system is not based on joint income tax reports. The mother, the woman, whatever her marital status, still files her own income tax report, if necessary. This I want to make quite clear. I do not really think that we should be concerned about it.

[*English*]

The sixth point had to do with tax discounters. There is a problem there. I would invite everyone to advise mothers to wait two months until they receive the full amount. Of course, cases might exist where mothers might wish to cash the anticipated benefits ahead of time. What was said last night in the House concerning the rate of 60 per cent which could be claimed by the tax discounters on the mother's anticipated return is quite incorrect. They cannot claim more than 15 per cent, all charges included. Hon. members will have to read the Tax Rebate Discounting Act.

**An hon. Member:** Read the form.

**Miss Bégin:** Officials from all the departments concerned have studied the matter. Perhaps 15 per cent is too much, but at least the amount is limited to a maximum of 15 per cent,