

Government Orders

on health care and education dollars on education, allowing those provinces in effect to spend Canadian dollars, dollars from the federal government which were designed to recognize the national importance of health care and post-secondary education on provincial highways, about which there is not a national interest.

Mr. Dennis Mills (Broadview—Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to have the opportunity to speak on this bill on the first day of resumption of debate here in the House of Commons. We all have had time to go to our ridings and listen to what people are saying in terms of priorities that are on their minds, the concerns that they have.

Without a doubt, the number one preoccupation of Canadians, not just in my riding, and we heard this when we had caucus meetings earlier this week, is unemployment. We must develop ways of putting people back to work. In the last month to six weeks, people with jobs are even more concerned about the unemployment problem than the people who are without jobs. They naturally feel that any day or any week could be the week where either they are going to be laid off or their company could be one of the companies that is being shut down or is forced to go into bankruptcy.

It is really important. I salute the member for Saskatoon—Clark's Crossing who talked in his speech about the issue of unemployment being right up there. I only wish he could transmit that message to his premier, the NDP premier in the province of Ontario. Just last Friday, a few days after that premier gave a speech on how important it was to put people back to work, he and his minister of municipal affairs, without even hearing a formal presentation on a job creation project just north of Toronto that would have created 17,000 jobs—the Queensville Properties project—a project that included an environmental university, some light industry and 5,000 affordable homes, was canned. They cancelled it without having a formal briefing.

I am really concerned about some of the hypocrisy that takes place when we get into this debate. I go back to the remarks of the Minister of State for Finance and Privatization when he led off this debate today. He said that this bill, this cap on CAP, is important because of the fiscal realities that we are dealing with in this country.

He said it was important because they must maintain their government's restraint program.

• (1330)

He talked about this bill helping put people back on their feet. This bill hurts those people who need it most, at a time in our history when we have probably never experienced such deep economic pain. How the government can rationalize this bill at this time, this cap on CAP, is beyond me. It is a further example of when this government sees a shortfall in revenue, instead of trying to figure out ways to create more wealth, it cuts. This is a government that for seven years has been retreating from its responsibility as a national government. Whenever it runs into a difficulty where there is a shortfall in funds, it cuts it, privatizes it, caps it.

We have now reached a point where this national government is so stripped and so decentralized that this institution can barely function as a national government. The people of Canada are aware of it. Quite frankly, if there is one thing that I learned in the last six weeks, it is that most Canadians think that this Parliament is irrelevant. Most Canadians believe we are not doing anything. In fact, most Canadians believe that if anything, we are making the situation worse.

I think to have this bill on the agenda the first day back, when people were looking for some leadership and some hope from this national government, is the height of cynicism. I really do. What we should be doing in this House of Commons today is debating morning, noon and night ways and means to put Canadians back to work.

If we were putting people back to work, this bill would not be necessary. The problem that we have, and the government is nervous about this, is that this year our unemployment insurance draw will reach close to \$20 billion and the welfare draw across this country will reach close to \$10 billion. Just in those two funds alone, it is equal to the entire deficit of this country for the whole year. In terms of logic and priority, if we could take that unemployment fund and move it to the productive side of the ledger, we would not be debating this bill. There would be no demand on special support for those most disadvantaged in our society. The extra demand for cash would not be required because people would be leading productive lives