

know, the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology has done a considerable amount of work on the problem of child poverty. Some of the proposals in the white paper are in concordance with the recommendations of the Senate committee. Some of the thrust of the proposals is indeed very desirable.

However, the numbers that the Leader cites are, I think, questionable. I wonder if he will be willing to give us some more information on them, because calculations made, not only by those of us who are amateurs, but by others who are not, indicate that families on lower incomes will receive not a penny more than they would have received in terms of child benefits if this plan should not come into effect. That is in the first year. Because of a lack of indexation, of course, those benefits will subsequently be reduced.

Furthermore, it has been suggested by some social welfare analysts that the government's proposal will lock the working poor into poverty by providing an incentive not to earn more than will be reimbursed on the extra earnings plan for the working poor. On both those areas separately, the analyses that I have seen indicate that this proposal in amounts of money is of no greater benefit than is currently received and will very quickly be a reduced benefit. I wonder if the Leader of the Government would like to comment further.

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government): I would not without further reference to the Department of Finance tables, some of which were published with or shortly after the budget. I will obtain those, and other information provided by the Department of Finance and the Department of Health and Welfare, and provide it to the honourable senator and to the Senate.

Senator Marsden: Thank you. In that case, the Leader of the Government might also want to look at the analyses that have been published in the press in Mr. Len Shifron's column. He is usually a very careful analyst and he has looked at the Department of Finance's figures. The Leader of the Government may also wish to note that in his defence of the Canada Assistance Plan, the costs to the provincial governments have risen considerably because the federal government has passed on costs and because, of course, the provinces have reduced revenues. Therefore, his analysis of the Canada Assistance Plan bill is not an entirely accurate description.

Senator Murray: Honourable senators, there is no cap, as the honourable senator knows, on our contribution to the seven provinces that, by way of shorthand, we call equalization recipients. The cap of 5 per cent increase is on those provinces that do not receive equalization. We continue to pay 50 per cent, do we not, of eligible expenses under the Canada Assistance Plan in seven of the ten provinces of Canada.

Senator Marsden: Well, honourable senators, I suggest the Leader's reply is a bit disingenuous, because it is in two of those three provinces that the greatest numbers of refugees arrive in the country, who are very often drawing benefits from the public purse. That is not a criticism. That is merely a commentary. The Leader of the Government will also know

[Senator Marsden.]

that the very largest number of poor people in this country live in the province of Ontario, for which benefits have been capped, so the relationship between the distribution of costs and the redistribution of benefits is a loose one in terms of the Canada Assistance Plan.

Senator Murray: I put the figures on the record the other day when we were debating this matter at second reading. A five per cent increase in the case of Ontario is quite a considerable increase. As I recall, overall, there is an increase of something like \$100 million provided for Ontario in the fiscal year that begins in April, to a total of \$2.2 billion for that province. We are talking about something in excess of \$6 billion, nationally. This is a very considerable contribution to all of those provinces for those programs.

Senator Marsden: Honourable senators, perhaps the Leader would also like to put on the record the rise in welfare costs for the three provinces that are under this cap. I think it is the relationship between costs—the genuine needs—and this 5 per cent amount that is the difficulty here.

[Translation]

FEDERATION OF FRENCH-SPEAKING AND ACADIAN COMMUNITIES

PARTICIPATION IN CONSTITUTIONAL CONFERENCES

Hon. Jean-Maurice Simard: Honourable senators, I have a question for the Leader of the Government in the Senate. I am sorry I did not give him prior notice. It is a bad habit of mine, but I hope my leader will forgive me.

My question concerns a press conference that was held yesterday. I have a press release which was probably distributed at this conference held by the *Fédération des communautés francophones et acadiennes du Canada*.

Could the Leader of the Government in the Senate give us the assurance that he will do everything he can to ensure consideration is given to the federation's request for a meeting with Prime Minister Mulroney, as soon as possible, to discuss a number of complaints, some of which are not entirely justified?

In my preamble, I feel I should set the record straight, because the *Fédération des communautés francophones et acadiennes*, unlike some reports in the media, never asked to sit at the constitutional table.

In fact, the federation corrected those reports this morning.

It asked to be consulted during the current constitutional process on any clause with an impact on the future of our communities. According to the federation, this request was confirmed verbally, but not in writing, by the Prime Minister's Office. They also wish to be actively consulted when study groups examine clauses that refer to linguistic duality.

There is a substantial difference between asking for a seat at the constitutional table and their other requests.

I think you will agree, honourable senators, that I have always supported our francophone federations and associations whenever I was able to do so. In this particular case, although I support a number of the federation's recommendations and