

The throne speech and many other pronouncements by the government have promised the restructuring of Canada's social programs as one of its major legislated programs for this Parliament. In the few minutes remaining to me here I would like to share with members of the House some insights I have gained from a study of these programs.

Before I do, I want to get out of the way one other fundamental and very important matter. From long experience I know that the discussion of social programs often leaves antagonists questioning each other's motives. Please, in our deliberations in this House let us not do so. Neither the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre nor the hon. member for Burnaby—Kingsway have a monopoly on compassion. It is because of my strong concerns about the ability of the government to deliver support to those in need in the future that I make the following remarks.

The issue for me and Reform is not whether the unfortunate in our society should be cared for but how best to care for them today and tomorrow. Canada's social programs are beset by three major problems.

First, too much of the spending benefits families with high incomes. For example, families with incomes of over \$100,000 a year in 1992 received \$2.5 billion and \$1.5 billion in UIC and OAS benefits respectively. Such transfers clearly are not consistent with the objective of providing a security net for Canadians beset by financial calamity. They are a subsidy to higher income earners that the country can no longer afford. They are the unwanted consequence of the noble desire to provide benefits universally without a means test.

Second, the current system has created incentives to which rational Canadians are responding in ways that greatly dismay socialists in Canada and the rest of the world.

• (1235)

Most of the hon. members here remember the choice faced by the single mother in Toronto who took her case to the media last summer. The media missed the main point by concentrating on whether or not she lost income by giving up her \$42,000 a year job and going on welfare. Even if she had suffered a loss of \$6,000, what the system does is that under these conditions she is asked to work for \$500 a month. She and many Canadians have been deciding that it is not worth their while to work for that amount of income. I do not blame her or anyone else on welfare or UIC for making such choices and neither does society. That is the reason why, in spite of record outlays for social programs, the problems today are alleged to be worse than they were even 20 years ago.

Third, the framers of our large and universal social insurance programs knew that, except in the case of seriously handicapped people, government support should be temporary. It knew that

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lengthy assistance would create dependency and ultimately hurt recipients more than it helped them on their life voyage. Experience with Canada's programs has now shown that dependency has become a serious problem for a dismaying large number.

The preceding diagnosis of the ills of Canada's social programs cries out for a prescription for a cure. I must confess to you, Mr. Speaker, and the other members of this House that I do not have such a prescription because basically I believe there are none.

What I do have are some ideas on how to alleviate the ills that I have identified. However, the discussion of these ideas must wait. In the meantime, I wish the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre and the government the best of luck in their own search for possible cures, band-aids and palliatives.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Laurent Lavigne (Beauharnois—Salaberry): Mr. Speaker, I would like to comment briefly on the speech by the hon. member of the Reform Party.

In my opinion, he touched on two critical points. The first is the high cost of social assistance for the less fortunate and the poor in our society. The second is the concern over the cost of administering the government. As of yesterday, the deficit topped the \$500 billion mark. This is absurd, frightening and, I would even say, dangerous.

Obviously there is reason for concern about Canada's ballooning debt. The daily interest alone on the debt is astronomical. Why is it that the first reflex we have when it comes to putting our finances in order is to target those who are the least fortunate?

There are many other things that we should consider before turning our attention to the disadvantaged, the poor, the sick, welfare recipients and so forth. This morning's edition of *Forum* tells the story. There are at least five to six pages of examples of government mismanagement.

Mention is made of the \$25 million spent on travel by ministers. Twenty-five million and perhaps ever more, according to the Auditor General. There is a reference to administrative oversights regarding tax breaks for resource companies. I cannot remember the exact amount quoted, but the figure was enormous. I think it was \$900 million. Then there is the enormous cost of running our embassies.

The Bloc Québécois wants to review each administrative item separately and clean house. I am certain there is a considerable amount of money to be recovered. Then, if further cuts were needed, perhaps then we could look at the most disadvantaged. However, we should not start with them. We must start by trimming the fat.