

Government Orders

House is committed to reform, to revitalize and rededicate this, our own institution.

Every one of us here representing the people of Canada must simply be determined to win unquestioned status for Parliament as the pre-eminent form and recognized champion of democracy in this country.

We have before us a formidable task: to reform parliamentary procedures, to foster more free votes, to enhance the role of members in committees so they can be more effective in amending bills, to allocate more time and higher priority to private members' bills and to ensure that seats do not remain vacant, thus denying people their representation, and major sweeping reform of the Senate.

It is indeed a formidable agenda. It is an agenda which has been placed firmly before us by the people of Canada. They have decided these are changes they want. These are changes whose time has come and our constituents have demonstrated amply that they want us to take action now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired.

Pursuant to Standing Order 96(1), the order is dropped from the Order Paper.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CANADA ASSISTANCE PLAN

MEASURE TO AMEND

Hon. John McDermid (for the Minister of Finance) moved that Bill C-32, an act to amend the Canada Assistance Plan, be read the third time and passed.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to debate third reading of Bill C-32, an act to amend the Canada Assistance Plan.

This bill has come back from committee without substantive change. The factors that made this legislation necessary at the time of the February budget have not changed.

I will take a few moments, if I might, to describe what the bill seeks to do and why it is necessary, given the fiscal realities of the federal and provincial governments.

As part of the government's restraint program, this bill will continue the ceiling on the growth in federal contributions under the Canada Assistance Plan to the provinces not receiving equalization payments. A 5 per cent ceiling on CAP transfers to these provinces covering the years 1990-91 and 1991-92 was introduced in the 1990 budget. This legislation will extend those ceilings through to 1994-95.

The bill has been carefully designed to balance our concern for needy Canadians and our desire to avoid placing unnecessary burdens on Canadians in future. The government is well aware of how important these dollars are in providing assistance to the neediest of Canadians.

CAP contributions help to provide the most basic requirements of life—food, shelter, and clothing—as well as social support in a variety of ways.

Broadly speaking, CAP allows the federal government to share the costs incurred by provinces and municipalities in providing key social services, social assistance to persons in need, welfare services, and certain work activity projects. While the federal government specifies the conditions under which a particular program is eligible for cost sharing, the provinces are responsible for designing and delivering the programs and ensuring their comprehensiveness. Programs supported by CAP help low-income Canadians by attacking the causes as well as the effects of their problems. In addition to support for many welfare support programs, CAP payments allow people to get back on their feet and working by helping to pay for tools and equipment needed to carry on a trade or other employment.

The success of CAP is not measured by how many people are dependent on it, and that is what we hear about today, but how many people it can help to regain personal independence. This independence would be worthless without a healthy economy and the jobs to go with it. It is to ensure the long-term health of the economy, threatened by the debt problem this government inherited when it came to office, that we must put certain limits on the funds we give the provinces for these purposes.