

• (1500 )

## SOCIAL PROGRAMS

**Mr. John Manley (Ottawa South):** Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday of this week, the Minister of Finance told the House of Commons that the One Voice Seniors Network supported the government's clawback of old age pensions. Yesterday, One Voice said that the minister was twisting its words by saying, and I quote:

Seniors were appalled yesterday to see their words twisted to support the government's controversial clawback legislation.

I would like to ask the acting prime minister, if you have one over there, will the government apologize to the seniors of Canada for the irresponsible way in which the Minister of Finance has distorted the words of Canadian seniors to try to justify this discriminatory tax?

**Hon. John McDermid (Minister of State (Privatization and Regulatory Affairs)):** Mr. Speaker, I am glad the hon. member raised this because I want to point out to him very carefully what has been said by Jean Woodsworth who is the president of One Voice, the Canadian Seniors Network. One of the quotes that was mentioned yesterday is that, "social benefits are given to every Canadian citizen as a right. They can be taxed back from the rich because the rich should pay more taxes than the poor," and it goes on to say, "but to extend the social safety net to some and not to others makes it a charity, not a right".

In the pre-budget consultations which the Minister of Finance had with various interested groups, Mrs. Woodsworth was there, and I want to quote exactly what she said as part of the presentation that was made to the Minister of Finance. She said:

—we agree with the Economic Council that people with over \$50,000 of income should have their OAS taxed back.

Now, going on to quote what the National Council on Welfare said:

—the advantage of the clawback is that it saves money, not by tampering with the contentious principle of universality, but rather by increasing the progressivity of social programs—the clawback does no damage to universality—

**Mr. Manley:** Mr. Speaker, I am delighted that the acting prime minister raised that meeting because here is what the One Voice Seniors Network says about that

meeting: "At that meeting he—" the minister—"specifically promised us he would not touch universal social programs". That, they say, was a real betrayal. "Now, he is taking our own words out of the context of our brief to make it look as though we agree with the clawback. Mr. Wilson has aggravated the anger and mistrust seniors are already feeling".

Is this government so desperate to find somebody who supports its tax measures that it has to go around twisting the words of senior citizens in Canada?

**Mr. McDermid:** Mr. Speaker, I believe it is the hon. member who is twisting the words of the Minister of Finance. It is very plain exactly what Mrs. Woodsworth, who was representing that group, said. She said it, and I will read it to you again. I will do so slowly:

—we agree with the Economic Council that people with over \$50,000 of income should have their OAS taxed back.

Yes, the minister said he would not tamper with universality. The National Council of Welfare says that in increasing the progressivity of social programs, the clawback does no damage to universality.

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## FISHERIES

**Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte):** Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. It has now been five weeks since the minister announced the special response program to assist fishermen and fish plant workers who suffered a disastrous season this year. Yet to date, during those five weeks, fewer than 50 per cent of the fishermen and fish plant workers throughout Atlantic Canada who have applied for assistance have been given any.

In my riding alone, some 459 of 912 families who have applied have been refused assistance under the minister's program.

Will the minister, in the few remaining days before Christmas, acknowledge that the program announced to date has been inadequate? Will the minister design new criteria to allow those fishermen and their families not to have to cancel Christmas this year?

It is not simply a matter of whether or not there will be gifts under the tree, it is a question of whether or not there will be turkey on the table.