

Private Members' Business

• (1835)

By working together we will ensure that a great tradition, our heritage and our commitment as a caring society, will continue into the 21st century.

[Translation]

Mr. Maurice Dumas (Argenteuil—Papineau): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Québec-Est has put before this House a motion which reflects the opinion held by seniors in my riding, in Quebec and in Canada. By reducing the age credit, the federal government is attacking the most vulnerable members of our society, because the majority of seniors have very modest incomes.

As spokesperson for seniors associations and organizations, I fully support my colleague's motion against the reduction of the age credit. The budget proposal is to reduce the age credit for individuals with net incomes exceeding \$25,921. The age credit will be reduced at a rate of 15 per cent of an individual's net income exceeding \$25,921. Senior with incomes over \$49,134 will no longer receive any age credit.

According to the Department of Finance, this measure will affect 800,000 seniors out of 2.6 million. This group includes 600,000 seniors with incomes between \$25,921 and \$49,134, and 200,000 seniors with incomes over \$49,134. Are we to understand from this measure that the government considers seniors with incomes of \$25,000 as rich? Whatever little efforts are made to reduce government spending are made on the backs of the disadvantaged.

The federal and provincial governments have a mandate to provide services to protect and promote the well-being of all Canadians. The governments must also work together with consumers and representatives from the non-profit sector, the industry and the business community to develop policies and programs. They must project a positive and realistic image of seniors.

The Income Security Programs Branch is responsible for the administration of old age security, the Canada Pension Plan and the child tax benefit. The branch employees are presently working in regional data processing control stations to approve requisitions for payment and keep the files of seniors and families who receive children benefits up to date.

In *Le Droit* of Ottawa-Hull for Thursday, February 24, 1994, the Association de défense des droits des retraités expressed outrage about the federal budget, which abolished the personal income tax exemption for seniors earning between \$25,000 and \$49,000 a year. Yvette Brunet, president of that association which defends pensioners' rights, said that it was odious and scandalous. Coming after election promises of tax fairness, the budget shows that this government does not really want change.

The wealthiest people are still spared by the tax department. Remember the tax shelters. Furthermore, the government is also trying hard to reduce services for seniors.

On May 10, I asked the minister responsible for seniors a question about the plan to install voice mail to answer inquiries from seniors. The minister simply told us about the speed of the proposed service. I explained that many seniors are reluctant to use such a service and they have expressed this opinion clearly through the representative of the Federation of Senior Citizens.

• (1840)

On May 11, 1994, I was at it again. I asked the following question in the House:

—Why does the federal government insist on attacking senior citizens, considering that most of them find it very difficult to deal with a system that is so impersonal?

The answer from the Minister of Human Resources Development was disarming and unacceptable. He said that this program would be more efficient and more personalized and give seniors better service.

A centralized telephone answering system using voice mail to answer all seniors' inquiries about government programs will have a huge impact on the quality of services provided to seniors.

EDS Limited, which never consulted the public, was hired by the government at a cost of \$220 million to make this change. EDS Limited intends to reduce services to clients who want to speak directly to an officer. Seniors will have to deal with an answering machine. The required listening and communication skills will no longer be available.

The few representatives working in the region will become inaccessible and permanent offices will disappear. Employees working for income security programs receive calls from seniors asking them to phone, on their behalf, the Régie de l'assurance-maladie du Québec, which uses a touch-tone recorded questionnaire. These people complain that they do not get the information they need.

EDS Limited itself admits that this service will reduce direct communications with agents. Because of this, seniors must increasingly rely on themselves and no one else. These people have good reasons to worry and even to rebel against unfair treatment. They want to be considered like full-fledged citizens and they want to be respected in every way, including from a tax point of view.

Seniors have gained a lifelong experience. They have helped build this country. They have the right to be informed in a human way to be able to support themselves. They rely on their savings, investments, private pensions, public fund transfers, and sometimes even on the generosity of their relatives. They are confronted with the rise in the cost of living. Making access to