

Commons Debates of February 4, 1992. This is a quote from a quote and it states:

It is expedient to introduce a measure to be known as the Canada Assistance Plan to establish a program for sharing with the provinces in the cost of assistance, including health care and welfare services provided to or in respect of persons in need, including mothers and children, older persons, disabled persons and unemployed persons who are in need, and in the cost of developing and improving assistance in welfare services programs, including child and youth welfare programs throughout Canada.

The legislation introduced many years ago by our distinguished colleague, Senator MacEachen, provided assistance for the first time from the federal government for care in homes for the aged, facilities for child care and transition houses for battered women. Certain uninsured health care costs such as drugs and dental services were also funded. Until the current government came along, the federal government was proud to contribute 50 per cent of the costs incurred by the provinces and municipalities in providing such services.

In the 1990 budget, the Conservative government announced that annual growth in CAP transfers was to be limited to 5 per cent for Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia in the fiscal years 1990-91 and 1991-92. The 1991 budget extended this ceiling through to the fiscal year 1994-95. We are now being asked to legislate this freeze through the passage of Bill C-32.

The government, honourable senators, has tried to justify this legislation by claiming that fiscal restraint must be exercised in order to reduce the national debt and the federal deficit. This government, which has spent \$1 trillion since it came to power, now wants to exercise restraint at the expense of the abjectly poor and at a time of recession when all the conditions of poverty are exacerbated. Think about it: The government has spent \$1 trillion—that is 1 followed by 12 zeros—and now wants people who get by on \$5,000 or \$6,000 a year to cut back. Hypocrisy. Unfortunately, it is not uncharacteristic of this government, but condemnable nevertheless.

The government caused the recession which has resulted in massive unemployment. The same government changed the unemployment insurance rules to throw people on to the provincial welfare rolls. The same government has failed to provide the necessary economic stimulus to help people get off the welfare rolls. Now this very same Conservative federal government, which has forced Canadians in record numbers on to welfare, is limiting the funds available for welfare. It herds them all into the welfare compound and then starts withdrawing the benefits of that welfare.

These are depressing policies in theory and tragic and depressing in application. According to the federal government's estimates the three affected provinces, Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario, will lose \$2.135 billion in federal transfers by the fiscal year 1995-96. The three provinces' own estimates are significantly higher. Ontario predicts the legisla-

tion will cost the province \$1 billion this year alone and that is—I would again remind honourable senators—Canada Assistance Plan money so that means \$1 billion less for the homeless and the hungry.

[*Translation*]

I wonder if this government even realizes that a million children live in poverty in Canada. I wonder if this government realizes that last year 700,000 children had to go to food banks. Does this government realize that the number of Canadian children living in poverty has increased by 150,000 in the last two years? Does this government realize that 2,200,000 Canadians receive welfare: 917,000 in Ontario, 244,000 in British Columbia and 156,000 in Alberta?

● (1000)

[*English*]

We know that the government claims this measure is affecting only the wealthiest provinces, but that is more smoke and mirrors. The fact is that B.C., Alberta, and Ontario are home to 46 per cent of the poor families in Canada and 54 per cent of all welfare recipients. Is the government trying to make us believe that most poor people live in these provinces but those same poor people in these three affected provinces are somehow less poor than the people in the other provinces? Does the government really believe that poverty travels over the country, looks down and does not cross certain borders?

Are there not enough people in abject circumstances for the government? Are the lines at the food banks not long enough? Are the waiting lists for shelters not long enough? Are the clinics for the abused and the abandoned not busy enough?

Honourable senators, we must think about what the government is doing. They want us to limit CAP transfers to Ontario to 5 per cent at a time when the number of people on social assistance in Ontario has increased by over 50 per cent in one year.

In Lanark County, where both Senator Murray and I have residences, there has been a staggering increase in welfare cases. This is a very small county, population-wise. Last December, there were 1,276 people receiving social assistance. The increase was 39 per cent over the previous years. Lanark County is in Ontario.

Ontario is in serious crisis. It is not the stereotyped "fat cat". The unemployment rate for the province is 9.7 per cent. I am talking about people now, not economic percentage points. There are 504,000 unemployed in Ontario. How can the government possibly justify this bill at this time? How can it envisage that the people of Ontario can afford this cutback? There is a crying need for support from the federal government at this time, not withdrawal of support. This government is not only ignoring that need, it is laughing at it.

Bill C-32 will leave many people hanging. The provinces affected by this legislation will not be able to keep up their level of services, and the government knows that. The people who will suffer are the people on social assistance and the ones standing in line for a meal at the soup kitchen and a space at