

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, February 28, 1974

The House met at 2 p.m.

[English]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

MAIN ESTIMATES, 1974-75

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE TREASURY BOARD

A message from His Excellency the Governor General transmitting estimates for the financial year ending March 31, 1975, was presented by Hon. C. M. Drury (President of the Treasury Board) and read by Mr. Speaker to the House.

Hon. C. M. Drury (President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, the main estimates for 1974-75 are made up of \$22,023 million in budgetary expenditures and \$1,275 million in loans.

On the budgetary expenditure side, the estimates are up \$2.4 billion over forecast expenditures for 1973-74, more than three-quarters of the increase being attributable to changes in the amount for statutory items.

Much of this increase occurs in payments to those particularly vulnerable to current inflationary pressures, whether because they are raising families or are on fixed incomes or are at least partly dependent on welfare. Thus, the most prominent component of the increase is for the family allowances payments which are expected to cost \$1,836 million in 1974-75. There are also much higher outlays expected for the Canada Assistance Plan and for veterans pensions and allowances.

The estimates book also records a forecast of \$3,432 million for old age security and guaranteed income supplement payments.

At the Western Economic Opportunities Conference the federal government put forward a number of proposals, some of which are being put into effect through expenditures in these estimates. Most prominent among the latter are expenditures of about \$43 million for the first year costs of programs of highway improvement and highway and railway development.

[Translation]

Faced with the necessity to increase Canada's energy supply, we are anticipating loans for the building of a CANDU reactor as well as a new heavy water plant. Funds will also be made available for the building in Cape Breton of a coal plant worth \$8 million, in order to facilitate the marketing of the coal produced by the new Lingan mine. Finally, other funds are earmarked to increase the government's shares in Panarctic Oils Limited.

Three years ago the government issued for the first time a booklet dealing with the estimates and called: How

Your Tax Dollar Is Spent. It is designed to better inform the public on how the government uses its revenues. Copies of the 4th edition will soon be distributed to hon. members and will also be available to the public free of charge upon request at any Information Canada Centre. The special theme this year deals with the Public Service which plays an essential role at the service of Canadians.

[English]

Hon. Marcel Lambert (Edmonton West): Mr. Speaker, in view of the fact the minister has made a fairly lengthy statement on a very complicated subject without having made it available to any member of the opposition before delivery, it is absolutely impossible to make any worthwhile statement in reply. I can only say that I regret that the minister has not followed his own previous practice and that of his predecessors in office. If a statement is to be made on the tabling of main estimates, as is being done at present, the minister should extend to us the courtesy of making available a copy of the statement at least on entering the House, if not beforehand. The way those opposite are behaving these days is rather nonsensical, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, obviously the time for detailed comment on these estimates will be after we have had a chance to peruse them and perhaps to understand them.

• (1410)

I am interested in the assertion of the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Drury) once again today that it is the government's practice these days to give us more information about the spending of the government than used to be the case. I still find that hard to believe. The bigger the Blue Book gets, the less understandable information it seems to contain.

Since we have been presented with this volume and with the minister's statement without any prior warning, the only comment I wish to make is that I do not like it when increased expenditures seem to be blamed in the main, as I thought the President of the Treasury Board did today, on the increase in social security, veterans' pensions and allowances, welfare payments and so on. I insist that these payments are not charges against the treasury or the government. They are an attempt by society to move to some extent in the direction of equalizing the positions of our people.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): This is one of the best things that organized society does—to collect from those who have in order to make it possible for those who have less, or those who have nothing, to enjoy something of the standard of living society as a whole is now