

*Borrowing Authority*

Senior citizens below a certain income. Is that a poor program? The spouses' allowance and the program we want to advance for widows and widowers, widows who get nothing between the age of 60 and 64, is that a poor program? I ask you: Is that a poor program?

**Mr. Lapierre:** It is a poor program.

**Mr. Epp (Provencher):** It is a poor program?

**Mr. Lapierre:** How about divorced and single people?

**Mr. Hnatyshyn:** Why did you not do something, then?

**Mr. Epp (Provencher):** Mr. Speaker, what about the Canada Assistance Plan, is that a poor program?

**Ms. Copps:** You are going to cut it out anyway.

**Mr. Epp (Provencher):** That also is not the case.

**Ms. Copps:** That is what you said in your directional paper.

**Mr. Epp (Provencher):** Mr. Speaker, I really should not respond to the Hon. Member for Hamilton East (Ms. Copps) because when one is hunting elephants one does not follow rabbit tracks.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Epp (Provencher):** Mr. Speaker, with about the Canada Assistance Plan, is that a poor program?

**Mr. Lapierre:** It is, because people have to—

**Mr. Epp (Provencher):** What I am hearing from the Liberals is that because of the nature of these programs they would eliminate them. Well, we will not because we want to help people who are not as wealthy as the rest of us.

Another point I want to make to the House and the Canadian people is something I said on November 15, but it obviously has to be repeated. Let me conclude by putting on the record some remarks I made on universality and on the process which I intended to deliver in the Throne Speech but did not complete because of time constraints.

At that time I offered two possible definitions of the meaning of universality. One might be that all social programs should be available to everyone regardless of need. Defenders of that definition, if there are any, must realize that they are not defending universality since no such thing presently exists except in the three programs I mentioned in my November 15 speech. The GIS and the spouses' allowance are two programs for which the basis of eligibility is need.

Another definition of universality might see social programs providing the same level of after-tax benefits to all recipients. Defenders of that definition must realize that there is no such thing as universality under that definition. The progressive tax system, which is not open to serious question as far as I know, ensures that benefits are taxed at a higher rate for high-income earners than for low or middle-income earners.

Therefore we want to create the opportunity, because we believe this is the best way to reach the right decision, for Canadians to consult with us. You might argue, Mr. Speaker, that consultation is dangerous. It is in the sense of believing that you have all the right answers and you are afraid that someone might give you an answer that is even better. Well, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to having good answers from Canadians. I look forward to Members in this House giving us good answers through this consultation process. I will consider them. What I will not consider are supposed answers based on short-term political gain.

**Mr. Hnatyshyn:** Distortions.

**Mr. Epp (Provencher):** I will not accept answers based on distortions. I will not accept answers which might be seen to be giving a short-term advantage to the Liberal Party, for example, over the NDP in their constant struggle as to who is number two. I will not do that. What I will do is listen to answers where Canadians will be better served, where they will have dignity and live independently, and where the Government of Canada, within the constraints it has, can meet those challenges. That is my role, that is my commitment to the House, and I hope it is understood from this moment on.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

● (1420)

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order, please. I would remind all Members that from now on speeches are limited at 10 minutes. The Hon. Member for Sudbury (Mr. Frith).

**Hon. Douglas C. Frith (Sudbury):** Mr. Speaker, since 10 minutes is not a very long period of time I wish to divide my speech into two parts; one on the substance of the issue here before the House, and the other on the process by which the Government has chosen to debate this most important issue. The process up until now has led to nothing but a disservice to the debate, with all respect to the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp). In essence, because of the confusion on the front benches of his own Government, he did a disservice to the Canadian public and this Parliament.

This morning when the Leader of the New Democratic Party (Mr. Broadbent) rose to speak in the House of Commons, he left the impression that it was the New Democratic Party which was responsible, in large part, for all of the social legislation that has been enacted in this country in its first 117 years of existence. I am not going to suggest that by any stretch of the imagination any one political Party in the country has a monopoly on virtue or truth. However, I will say that the Liberal legacy is one that we can all be proud of as Canadians. For the majority of the time in the last 70 years the Liberal Party has sat on the government side. It was the Liberal Party which brought in family allowance, Old Age Security and the pension system in this country.

I would like to remind the House of one thing so that when we open up this debate some time in the New Year we will have the parameters of the debate in perspective. Every time a