

Canada Assistance Plan

the increased social assistance payments this year, I have no doubt that last year's total of \$2.7 billion will be considerably exceeded. I imagine that in the current year we are probably looking at a figure considerably in excess of \$3 billion, \$3 billion being the federal contribution, which means that the total money spent must be in the order of some \$6 billion or more.

I would like to hear from the Parliamentary Secretary who will be speaking on behalf of the Government whether the Government is giving any serious consideration to revising the Canada Assistance Plan so as to make it somewhat easier for the less wealthy Provinces to provide the social assistance payments necessary in these difficult times in those areas of the country where there is increased unemployment and where, as a result, more people are having to turn to welfare to put bread on the table.

I find it unfortunate that we have to go through a motion to request documents which, I believe, should already be in the public domain. I hope that with this continuing pressure one of these days the Provinces will agree that, in instances where the public purse is spending such large sums of money, all the material necessary for scrutiny will be available to the public.

I must put this on the record. I understand that it is not a refusal on the part of the federal Government to produce but that the federal Government must have the approval of the Provinces before it can produce the document I am requesting today. I would be happy if the Parliamentary Secretary would also comment on that point.

Mr. Bob Corbett (Fundy-Royal): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity this afternoon to speak on the motion of the Hon. Member for Vaudreuil (Mr. Herbert). His Notice of Motion No. 75 requests a copy of the latest agreement between the federal Government and the Province of New Brunswick under the Canada Assistance Plan.

As I know you are well aware, Mr. Speaker, New Brunswick relies quite considerably on its co-operation with the federal Government, particularly in its dealings with the federal Government in assisting it to meet its obligations to those citizens of New Brunswick who are perhaps not as fortunate as their colleagues and who do require assistance from time to time either through the Department of Social Services or in a more universal way through the health care programs which the Province of New Brunswick has instituted. I am pleased to say that these are second to none in the nation.

I would also like to say a portion of these funds are channelled through to our educational requirements in the Province of New Brunswick which also are second to none in the Dominion of Canada.

As the Hon. Member has pointed out, New Brunswick does perhaps suffer more from a climate of difficult and poor economic times than the more industrialized parts of the nation, despite the efforts of the provincial government to attract new and exciting venture capital, which it has done quite successfully. The fact is that New Brunswick, along with Atlantic Canada, has suffered depressing times because of extenuating circumstances beyond its control over the last number of years.

I think it is also appropriate to point out that most likely New Brunswick, as well as its sister Provinces of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, the maritime Provinces, provides a greater proportion per capita of its provincial income to these social programs, areas of social assistance, education and health programs than a number of its counterparts throughout the rest of the nation. So it is extremely important that New Brunswick continue to maintain a level of compensation from the federal Government that will ensure New Brunswickers are given as fair an opportunity as the rest of the citizens of this nation who live in other Provinces.

In that regard New Brunswick, I think, has probably experienced, over the last several months in particular, some devastating blows to its economy, blows which will, over the next few weeks or months, create a tremendous economic burden on the provincial government, the treasury and ultimately on its citizens. We have some very obvious examples, examples that unfortunately would not have had to come about if it were not for some of the policies that were instigated and undertaken by the present Government.

I would like to point out in particular the Federal Government's decision to close down CFB Chatham and to move the facility of that air base to Quebec. This move will put approximately 3,500 jobs out of existence in the Chatham-Newcastle area. Despite the assurances of the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Lamontagne) during the recent election campaign, which was successfully contested by the New Brunswick Conservative Government for an unprecedented fourth consecutive term, that the Government would relocate a department of its pay division to the Chatham area which would create 350 jobs—apparently 250 new ones since I understand that pay division only has 100 paying jobs in its department at the present time—this is a long way from replacing jobs which will be sorely missed by the Chatham and Newcastle region as a result of the Government's decision to move that air base from Chatham to the Province of Quebec. Those 350 jobs will barely represent 10 per cent of the total jobs which will be lost by the movement of that air base.

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I would like to point out as well that the Province of New Brunswick has done much to alleviate the unemployment situation at a time when the Federal Government should perhaps have been taking a more active role in living up to its responsibilities and commitments to Provinces such as New Brunswick by ensuring that the citizens of that Province could live in an atmosphere and climate where they would be able to continue working and provide a decent living for their families.

During recent months we have seen negotiations successfully completed between Heath-Steele Mines, again in the northern region of New Brunswick, and the provincial government. Due to poor markets and a poor economic climate it was about to close down and throw a number of other people out of work. However, the provincial government successfully concluded