

2.8 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Minister for Social Security regarding the “winners and losers” under the Income Support scheme:

Will the Minister provide a breakdown in terms of gender, status and age of the “winners and losers” under the income support scheme in terms of differentials between previous and current benefits and, in particular, of those recipients affected by the £4.1 million reduction in transitional relief outlined for 2009, and if not, why not?

Senator P.F. Routier (The Minister for Social Security):

When I first saw this question it occurred to me I wondered how I was going to be able to answer this as an oral question with all the detail that is being asked for. Perhaps some thought should be given to that. Income support has now been in operation for 2 months. As planned, the department is now in the process of undertaking a detailed analysis of the income support and transitional claims before finalising the fine detail of the future protected payment benefits. This work will be undertaken during this month. I will be issuing a report to Members in May giving more information on transition and the effect on different household groups. As most Members will be aware, income support is a household benefit. The analysis that we are planning will be based on household type; that means pensioners, couples, lone parents, *et cetera*. The Deputy’s request for a breakdown by gender, age and status is not relevant as income support is based on households and not individuals.

2.8.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

I am pleased with the response so far, that there will be information published by May. However, it is important before going on into 2009 that we do get a thorough understanding of what is happening to income support, and will he accept to undertake a study of the impact in terms of winners and losers on households of the income support scheme in time for Members to digest the information clearly in order to be able to debate the Business Plan for 2009, because that is when hard and fast decisions will start to be made about where we spend money?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I am surprised the Deputy does not recall the debate we had in September and the information that was given at that stage. We did provide Members with the transitional arrangements which were available to Members to help them make a decision whether to go ahead with income support and the way we would be supporting people through the transition. But, as I say, once we have all the information available to us which we are gathering during this month, we will then be able to decide exactly on how the available money that we have from the Treasury for 2009 will be utilised.

2.8.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

It is not the question I asked. Will he guarantee that he gives sufficient information to this House in good time for the Business Plan debate so that Members can assess the effectiveness and the impact of income support during that debate?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I am not sure which debates we would be having because we have already had the debate on income support and how transition is going to work. It is the responsibility of my department and myself to use the available transition money, which is known within the budget, to the best possible effect. I think possibly what would be a better approach would be for the Deputy, who is a member of the Income Support Sub-Panel to perhaps use that opportunity, through the Sub-Panel, to sit down with my department and myself to discuss these things rather than trying to get them out through questions within the House. **[Approbation]** Certainly, the questions that are posed by the Deputy on income support are very useful in order to have the information out, but it would be far more productive and more useful for us to have a reasonable discussion within meetings with the Income Support Sub-Panel.

2.8.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Final supplementary from me, Sir. Will the Minister at least bring to the House's notice the figures of winners and losers in reference to what were recipients of attendance allowance? There are some 700 households or individuals receiving attendance allowance in the past; will he bring to the House information concerning the after-housing cost effect impact of income support on recipients of attendance allowance, in particular?

Senator P.F. Routier:

That sort of information will be fairly difficult to give in a reasonable way for anybody to look at and understand it because people's circumstances change all the time. We have a mechanism we put in place for income support which does assess people in an equitable way. For us to be able to give the information the Deputy is requiring would... because everybody's situation changes, their income changes and their circumstances change, to make a comparison is very, very difficult. I make that as an observation for the Deputy. I think he is trying to set us up with an impossible task.

2.8.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

I thought it was the final supplementary but I am getting more and more evasive answers from a man who does not appear to be on top of his brief. During the general debate about the principles of income support we were given time and time again assurances that under income support there would be some winners and some losers but that overall there was a shift of benefits of those most in need. Will the Minister come to this House with clear figures indicating what has been the impact of income support on previous recipients of attendance allowance, in some form or other so that, to start with, this House can start to decide about what the actual impact was and who are the winners and who are the losers under this new scheme because we now need to decide - because nobody in this House knew exactly how income support would be delivered, the Minister when he brought it did not quite know, and certainly did not explain it clearly - we now need to know this year how it is working so that we can correct what I believe we will find to be serious defects in the scheme he proposed.

Senator P.F. Routier:

I will do my utmost to give that information to the Deputy and to this House. The ability of myself to utilise the budget that I have to ensure... I have already been criticised a couple of weeks ago for bringing in changes to the care elements that allow people to go to the doctors. We have reacted to an issue and the Deputy tried to turn that, at that stage, into a negative when it was a really positive thing to be doing. That will be the similar sort of circumstance. Once we have the information collated we will then - and I will then - be in a position to be able to use the money we have available in an appropriate way.