

divorced and married persons 60 to 64 years of age. Indeed, a similar concern was expressed in 1979 when we debated the bill which resulted in the continued payment of the spouse's allowance until age 65 in the event of the pensioner's death.

At that time honourable senators pointed out that the Spouse's Allowance Program did not include unattached men and women, including widowed persons 60 to 64 years of age who had not been eligible for the allowance at the time of their spouse's death. Despite this concern, we still recognized that the program was being improved, and we gave that 1979 bill our approval.

As a result, the husbands and wives who lost their pensioner spouse no longer had their allowance cut off six months after the pensioner's death. One small group of widowed persons—approximately 6,300 in 1984—have been the fortunate beneficiaries of that change.

We also saw the necessity for approving that change to the Spouse's Allowance Program because of its positive side. I am confident that the amendment before us today, which will extend the protection of the Spouse's Allowance Program to another 85,000 widowed persons in this country, will receive our approval for the same reason.

This extension of the Spouse's Allowance Program is not inexpensive. In 1985-86 the proposal is estimated to cost \$190 million, and, in 1986-87, its first full year of implementation, the cost will be approximately \$350 million. Given the numerous restraint measures that the government has had to introduce in order to take aim at the huge deficit, including restraints on social program spending, the fact that this measure has been brought forward is evidence of the government's commitment to help those persons most in need.

Unfortunately, there are those who say that the government should not be expanding the Spouse's Allowance Program at this time. They argue that since the money is not available to help all low-income 60 to 64 year olds, the government should do nothing at all. But I am pleased to note that this was not the position taken by the anti-poverty organizations or women's groups. Certainly those groups would like to see the spouse's allowance provided to all 60 to 64 year olds in need. We too would like to see that. However, they have realistically accepted the economic realities and they applaud this bill, which will indeed take care of a very vulnerable group of near-elderly persons.

As honourable senators may already be aware, both legal and common-law spouses are recognized under the Old Age Security Act. However, it is worth while to draw your attention to an amendment which has been made to Bill C-26 since it was first introduced in the other place. The definition of common-law spouse has, since its introduction under the Old Age Security Act in 1975, required that in addition to public representation as husband and wife, the couple must have lived together for three years if there was a bar to marriage. Where there is no bar to marriage, only one year's cohabitation is required. Under this program, through the amendment, there is no reason to distinguish between those couples who have a

bar to marriage and those who do not. Thus, the bill now before us simply requires cohabitation for one year.

As noted earlier, low-income widows and widowers will, if we give prompt passage to this bill, become eligible for the spouse's allowance this September. Of course, annual application must be made, and the amount of allowance paid will depend on the amount of other income that the recipient has.

Given the large number of widowed persons who will, for the first time, become eligible for spouse's allowance benefits, there is a great deal of administrative work to be done in order to ensure that those eligible will begin to receive their benefits as soon as possible. The measure quite naturally will need to be publicized in order to ensure that eligible persons are aware of their right to the allowance. Also, application forms will have to be made available to potential beneficiaries who, in turn, must complete and return the applications to the Department of National Health and Welfare. Only then can eligibility be considered, the amount of the allowance be calculated, and the first cheques made ready for delivery in September—which is not very far away.

Honourable senators, in order to ensure that the necessary time is available to have the allowance available for payment in less than three months from now, I can only stress the need and appeal for your co-operation in giving prompt passage to the bill. Certainly we can then ensure that a very deserving group of Canadians, who have long had to do without, can begin to receive the assistance they so richly deserve as quickly as possible.

Hon. M. Lorne Bonnell: Honourable senators, I had not intended to speak to this bill. However, it is an important piece of legislation. As the minister said when the bill was being studied in committee, it represents another giant step for mankind—or, at least, womankind—in the progressive development of social services in this country.

I have a few questions that I should like to direct to the sponsor of the bill. Perhaps, when closing the debate on second reading, he will be able to provide the answers.

The bill has already been pre-studied. The committee was in favour of the legislation as being progressive, but expressed the view that it did not go far enough to include more people. However, there is no end to how far we can go, and if we proceed one step at a time, perhaps next year we can give consideration to some of those who have not been included in this legislation. I should have liked to see the legislation cover all people who are aged 60.

I should like to ask the sponsor of the bill how much income a person must have so as not to receive any assistance under this new legislation. I can see that it could involve a graded scale. As one's income increases, one would probably receive less assistance.

Approximately \$50 million will be saved by the Department of Veterans Affairs because many widows are receiving the War Veterans Allowance or benefits under other legislation. Of that sum that is being saved by the Department of Veterans Affairs, how much is being saved in each of the provinces?