

saying that 17 cents a day does not count, because if you are trying to eat every day 17 cents a day does count. I do not minimize that at all. What I am saying is that the real impact of this measure in 1986, which is the budgetary year in question, is the one that we should think about. These extensions—and we heard it today—for the next five years are interesting, but I would be rather surprised if those forecasts about indexing were any more accurate than the forecasts made by the Leader of the Opposition when he was telling us where the deficit is going to go. It is not accurate at all. Nobody can say what the legislative provisions will be after 1986 because those budgets have first to be brought into effect. The basic question is, should men and women who get the old age pension and the GIS suffer any shortfall from de-indexing? After all, these are the people on the GIS who are really in need. That is why the government has taken a certain precaution, which I shall come to before I am through.

I want to be clear: I support the budget. We know that we cannot let interest costs continue to eat up more of the tax money. I agree that indexing is part of the problem and certainly must be dealt with. I know that Canadians want, through this budget, to see new opportunities and more jobs, but they also want to keep the things that they think are good, and certainly this question of old age pensions has to come into that particular category. But the pensioners ought to know that their sacrifices are not going to be in vain because with these very same budgetary measures that we are criticizing so vehemently this afternoon we should take into account the fact that because of some of these changes the government has been able to extend its social services not necessarily to the same people but to the needy who comprise a large section of our population. We have been able to extend the eligibility for spouse's allowance to cover another 85,000 people, mostly single women and women with children. They will receive hundreds of millions of dollars in 1986 on that account. Some 180,000 handicapped men and women will receive a worthwhile consideration in their income tax statements: Over \$2,500 is the figure. That will involve considerable cost to the public purse. We are changing the pension rules—and I will admit this is not within the government body—on private pensions to make sure that women, spouses, get fairer treatment in this respect. We are freezing the unemployment insurance contributions, which everybody knows are just a direct tax on the workers of this country. If we keep them down, we will be doing a good thing.

● (1650)

There are measures in this budget which extend the social services net to almost a quarter of a million people who did not have it before. I think there are a good many among the old age pensioners who would think that a good thing.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Senator Roblin: I see no reason to be ashamed of that. Then, of course, we have increased the incentive for people to provide their own pensions, which is a good thing.

But if anyone thinks we do not have a problem with seniors, they had better think again, because we have. Let us try to

[Senator Roblin.]

analyze that problem to see how we can come to grips with it. I was interested to see some figures produced concerning the economic status of seniors. While one has to take polls and research figures with a grain of salt, one can, I think, maintain that they show general directions.

With respect to those over 65 in the country, in this particular survey, 84 per cent said they were satisfied with their personal economic circumstances. For all I know, they may have said that before they heard from Mr. Wilson. Although this report was published on June 6, I do not know when the poll was taken. It indicates that a good many old age pensioners are making do. I am not saying they are going to Florida in the wintertime, but I am saying that like a good many Canadians they are making do.

Forty per cent of them were reported as having incomes of over \$25,000. Not a large sum, but, nevertheless, a good many people manage on it well. I also report to you that 35 per cent made less than \$15,000. Those are the people who attract my particular interest and concern. I also report to you that, according to the poverty line used here, about 57 per cent were below the poverty line. We must always remember that, in calculating poverty lines, something we do not always do is consider the value of medicare and social services which apply to everyone.

Honourable senators, that is not really what I want to draw attention to; I want to draw to your attention the fact that, although we are legislating for 1986, we cannot overlook the future. There is a time bomb in connection with senior citizens which only the future will reveal. In 1981, 10 per cent of our population was over 65, but, according to present trends, in a short time, by the year 2000, 25 per cent will be over the age of 65; and a little while after that, by the year 2031, about one person in three will be over the age of 65. This means that two people will be working, we hope, to support or to provide the economic activity to support one senior.

That has to be a serious consideration. Anyone who looks at the situation with respect to pensioners, based on today's situation only, is in for a rude awakening. I am not quite sure that I am young enough—Senator Croll is—to have to deal with this problem 10 years down the road, but someone will have to. We have to start thinking about it now.

Under the GIS, the singles, with old age security and the GIS together, receive a grand total of \$7,200 a year. Not a large sum. They continue to receive the GIS until they reach \$11,250 when they are cut out entirely.

As far as married people are concerned, they get the GIS and the old age security which adds up to \$12,000. You still have to scrape pretty hard to make that go far enough. The GIS cuts out for married people at \$17,000 a year.

Of the old age pensioners, one-quarter receive the full GIS and 50 per cent receive partial GIS payments. It would be heartless to deny the tragedy of poverty. It would be heartless to ignore the elders, particularly the single elders, who face the worst conditions. We need to try to find a better understanding of the problem to understand the future that appears to be