

increase that is substantial and not just a token. Our view—we stated this very clearly in the last parliament and we stated it very clearly in the course of the election campaign—is that the basic pension, the universal pension paid under the Old Age Security Act, should now be increased to \$150 a month.

If the government wishes to retain its principle of a supplementary amount on top of that basic pension, we will go along with it, but we insist that there must be a substantial increase in the basic amount of the pension itself. We want it to be \$150. We might give consideration to some figure between the present \$82.88 and \$150, but let the minister not try to fob us off with nothing being added to the basic pension and with simply trying to add an increase to the supplement.

A substantial increase, in our terms, means an increase in the basic monthly pension. And we want that increase to be substantial. And we want it now. As a matter of fact, we want a great deal more than members of the Conservative party were prepared to commit themselves to during the course of the election campaign. When the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) was in Vancouver he was asked, as were other party leaders, by representatives of various pension organizations out there if he would support a basic pension across the board of \$150 a month. He said he was prepared to give an increase but he was not prepared to commit his party to an increase up to \$150 a month, nor has he done so even yet. Until my friends in the Progressive Conservative party are prepared to state what figure they are prepared to give, I suggest they cease perpetrating their gimmicks that only mislead the pensioners of this country.

• (1540)

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

**Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** I say to the Minister of National Health and Welfare that a priority equal to the need to increase substantially the basic amount of the pension, is the need to lower the eligible age. If the government is not prepared in these few weeks or in this session to adopt completely the program that we have announced, namely, making pensions under both the Old Age Security Act and the Canada Pension Plan available at age 60 to all those who are not in the labour market, at least they should make a start on such a program. A few years ago the government found a way of lowering the pension age from 70 to 65 without doing it all at once. That is something it could do now. The old age security pension and retirement benefits under the Canada Pension Plan could be made available this year at age 64, next year at age 63 and so on until we get down to age 60.

Another move in that direction is to provide that the old age pension is payable to the spouse where the breadwinner is on pension, even if that spouse has not yet attained the age set out in the Old Age Security Act. I noticed yesterday that the Minister of National Health and Welfare referred to the problems of spouses not on pension and to the problems of persons just under the pension age. He did not make a commitment in that area as he did with respect to the amount of the proposed increase, but he referred to the subject and that gives me hope, to know

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*The Address—Mr. S. Knowles*

that he is thinking about it. I say to the minister that this is one of the things that must be achieved before this parliament winds up.

Mr. Speaker, when we say that this parliament was sent here to do a job, when we say that we want to see this parliament work, we insist that one of the areas in which it must produce the goods is with respect to the lowering of the eligible age. We would like to see it brought down to age 60 right away under both the Old Age Security Act and the Canada Pension Plan, but at least the legislation must be put on the statute books to get that process started. We place that suggestion before the Minister of National Health and Welfare and before the government as a whole.

Another improvement that needs to be made in the Old Age Security Act concerns the escalation of pensions, which now takes place on an annual basis. Several years ago when Miss Judy LaMarsh, the then minister, first announced the proposal to increase the old age security pension on a basis related to the cost of living index, I complained right away. She tried to throw back at me that this was something we had been requesting for years. I pointed out that this was not the case; we had been asking for pensions to be related to the standard of living, the gross national product, to the wage index, not just to the cost of living index.

We are discovering that even though the government has removed the 2 per cent ceiling on the annual increase, the escalation according to the percentage rise in the cost of living index always leaves the old age pensioners behind. They are going to receive an increase in April, 1973, based on the percentage rise of the consumer price index in 1972 over what it was in 1971. They are behind, and every year as this happens they get further behind. One solution would be a quarterly or monthly escalation, although I do not believe that would really be a satisfactory solution. I think it would cause more complications than it is worth. The real solution is to relate the increase in the old age security pension to the gross national product, to the wage index or any such index that measures the rise in the standard of living, and not just the rise in the cost of living.

So, Mr. Speaker, I say to the Minister of National Health and Welfare that I welcome his attitude most warmly. It came as a pleasant surprise to me. I had thought that the minister was one of the Trudeau backroom boys and that when he got here on the front bench he would be as restrictive and niggardly as the Trudeau government has been in the last few years. For some reason or other there has been a change over there, Mr. Speaker. They are willing to look at things they would not look at last year at all.

When the minister is looking at the Old Age Security Act, I would ask him to look at all the features I have placed before him this afternoon. They are important to the people of Canada, for they do not want this parliament to wind up or get dissolved without action being taken on these important aspects of this important subject—Canada's Old Age Security Act.

By the same token, Mr. Speaker, I call upon the Minister of National Health and Welfare to bring before this parliament improvements in the Canada Pension Plan. Again, I