

Old Age Security Act

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): I will remind both Hon. Members, the Government Deputy Whip and the Hon. Member for Montreal-Sainte-Marie (Mrs. Mailly and Mr. Malépart), that the period for questions and comments is allowed at the discretion of the Chair, and it is in order, occasionally, to ask a member to limit his speech whenever it is thought that he is exceeding his right to speak. But in the case of the Hon. Member for Montreal-Sainte-Marie (Mr. Malépart), I think you had just started speaking, and I see no reason whatsoever to step in at this point.

Mr. Malépart: To continue, Mr. Speaker... That was a question I was directing to the previous speaker while giving him an example, so everybody could understand well.

There is in my riding a certain Mrs. Lebrun who is 62 years of age. She lives alone in her apartment. A widow for the past five years, she pays \$250 per month in rent and gets \$427 per month in social welfare. Her next door neighbour, a Mrs. Leblanc, is 62 also. She too lives alone in her apartment. She too pays \$250 per month in rent and gets \$427 per month in social welfare. She has been separated from her husband for the past five years. Her other next door neighbour, a Mrs. Legris, is also 62. She too lives alone in her apartment for which she too pays \$250 per month in rent, while receiving also \$427 per month in social welfare. She is single. Could my hon. colleague indicate to me on what criterion of justice the Prime Minister based his judgment that Mrs. Lebrun is faced with a more distressing situation than her two next door neighbours?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): The Hon. Member for Saint-Léonard-Anjou (Mr. Gagliano) has the floor.

Mr. Gagliano: Mr. Speaker, that was the very drift of my speech. I said that we support the introduction of Bill C-26, but that we feel it is discriminatory in that, as my hon. colleague clearly explained, two people of the same age and living in the same surroundings will be treated differently simply because one married and the other remained single. That is what I was saying in my remarks. That situation is discriminatory, unfair and should not be tolerated in 1985.

[English]

Mr. John Reimer (Kitchener): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to add a few comments in support of Bill C-26, the amendments to the Old Age Security Act, and to support the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp). As this is my first speech in this parliamentary session, I would like to thank the electors in Kitchener for their tremendous vote of confidence in me and their words of support and encouragement since September 4. I hope I am able to do justice to their confidence in me.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Reimer: Permit me to make a few comments about the riding of Kitchener, Mr. Speaker. The City of Kitchener is

well known as a clean city with excellent educational and support services for its citizens, including a very well known farmers' market. The people of the federal riding of Kitchener are an industrious, hard-working and skilled group of people. "Diversified" is a word which best describes the economic community in the Kitchener area. From food products to footwear, chemicals to computer systems, automotive parts to appliances, textiles to tools and motors to heavy machinery—all of these and many other products are manufactured in Kitchener. Indeed, the riding continues to attract excellent new investment because of the enterprise and commitment of its businessmen and, more importantly, the skill and dedication of its labour force.

Kitchener and the Waterloo region is also an area of deep religious roots and conviction as well as an area which has been greatly enriched by its cultural heritage. That is especially true of its German heritage. I know I speak with a pride in my constituency which is common to all Members of Parliament, Mr. Speaker, and let me assure you that this pride is exceeded only by a desire to see the Kitchener riding continue to prosper.

I support this Bill, Mr. Speaker, because it is an important step towards greater social justice. The Bill provides for some financial assistance to approximately 72,000 widows and some 13,000 widowers, to a maximum allowance for widowed spouses of \$536.26. Although no Bill of Parliament can help the person who has just lost a loved one, the Bill nevertheless does assist that widow or widower to at least cope financially, albeit not in luxury but not in poverty either. I would like also to make the point that this Bill fulfils another of our election promises, together with other actions on many of our other promises such as the announcement on metric measurement, the Canadian National passenger rail service, the Investment Canada Bill and the actions within our economic statement.

Permit me, Mr. Speaker, to make a brief historical review of this type of legislation. The idea was first proposed by the then Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau, during the 1974 election campaign. He was going to bring in a spousal allowance which would provide a pension for the younger spouse where the older spouse was over 65 and had a pension. It was then subsequently introduced in the fall of 1975. It provided that where the spouse was between 60 and 65, married to and living with an older spouse who was on a Canada pension, then the younger spouse would receive the allowance to a maximum total of the equivalent amount of the old age security and the guaranteed income supplement at the married rate.

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There was, however, one major weakness. That weakness was that if the elder spouse died, the younger spouse's allowance was immediately cut off. The legislation was later amended by the Liberals in the spring of 1979 so that if the elder spouse died the allowance would be extended to the younger spouse for a period of six months. Of course, the obvious question would be: "Why not extend it until age 65?"