

Government Orders

We AFEAS members are strongly opposed to your project to provide services to seniors through voice mail instead of having real people answer questions about income security.

We ask you to reconsider this unfortunate decision as soon as possible.

On May 11, 1994, I insisted again. I then asked the House: Why does the federal government insist on attacking senior citizens, considering that most of them find it very difficult to deal with a system that is so impersonal?

Last September 28 in this House, I asked the following question of the Minister of Human Resources Development: Does the Minister of Human Resources Development still intend to slash programs for seniors in order to finance other federal government programs? Will we have to wait until after the Quebec referendum to know the answer?

On September 29, I rose again in this House, in an attempt to get a formal commitment from the government not to tax RRSPs. The purpose of my remarks is not to reject all the measures in Bill C-54 affecting senior citizens, given that certain rules that complicated their lives unnecessarily have been relaxed.

However, the government must guarantee seniors a certain security by not slashing the social programs that affect them. The government's direct expenses associated with senior benefits, which include old age security, the guaranteed income supplement and the spouse's allowance, represent \$20.6 billion in 1994-1995. The burden carried by seniors must be fair and equitable. Recent studies indicate that one person in eight is over 65.

In ten years, the number of people 65 and older will increase by at least 40 per cent. More Canadians aged 65 and older will have to rely on the ability to pay of working Canadians aged 15 to 64. However, many seniors are still active and prefer to live at home, look after themselves and make their own decisions.

With respect to seniors who wish to live together, one measure that I find very discriminatory is reducing old age security payments when seniors living in a residence decide to share an apartment with their spouse. Do you not think that more humanity, more generosity and less pettiness are in order?

In conclusion, I move, seconded by the hon. member for Châteauguay, that all the words after the word "that" be struck out and the following substituted:

"this House declines to give second reading reading to Bill C-54, An Act to amend the Old Age Security Act, the Canada Pension Plan, the Children's Special Allowances Act and the Unemployment Insurance Act, because it does not provide a penalty under the Criminal Code for the disclosure of personal information concerning beneficiaries to persons who are not legally authorized to such information pursuant to Access to Privileged Information."

• (1055)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Hon. colleagues, there have been discussions, and the amendment is in order.

[English]

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary North, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, as critic for human resources development I have some statements to make about the bill.

For the benefit of Canadians who are joining the debate by television, I would like to set out the purpose of the bill. It deals with major pieces of legislation involving enormous expenditures by the government. However the bill is not a major initiative. It is a piece of housekeeping and its purpose, according to the summary, is to improve services to clients to allow for more efficient program administration and to increase efficiency between programs in the case of old age security and the Canada pension plan.

It is almost exclusively concerned with amendments to the Old Age Security Act, that is the first 16 pages of the bill; with the CPP act which takes us through the first 30 pages of the bill; with the Children's Special Allowances Act which takes up a couple of pages; and with the Unemployment Insurance Act which takes up another couple of pages. These acts are housekeeping in nature but, as has been stated by my colleague from the Bloc, there are some policy considerations that should be brought out as we debate the piece of legislation.

The government speaker who spoke on the bill in the House this morning played rather heavily on the government's "commitment to seniors". Back in January the government introduced with much fanfare a review of our social security system. I will read from the terms of reference that were put forward to the House respecting that review: "that the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development be directed to consult broadly, to analyse and to make recommendations regarding the modernization and restructuring of Canada's social security system", and this is the operative part, "with particular reference to the needs of families with children, youth and working age adults".

Seniors are quite conspicuous by their absence from this mandate and review of the social security system. At the time the mandate was debated in the House I stood and proposed that it was deficient in that it ignored our social security system as it related to seniors. Seniors are some of the people most impacted by our social systems. OAS, CPP and health care are very much of concern to seniors. Yet their interests were ignored in the terms of reference for the review. Now the government stands and plays the violin about its commitment to seniors. That is a little hypocritical.