paying $125 or so across the board to everyone aged 65 or over, we are paying over $200 a month to those individuals who get the full supplement, and we are paying over $400 a month to a couple, both of whom are on the supplement. In some of the provinces the pensions are even higher, but with inflation running as it is and with it being established that our people have not only the right to keep up with the cost of living but to share in the standard of living, and with the increased productivity of our country, I contend the time has come for us to talk in terms of pensions across the board of $300 a month.

To get back to this bill, Mr. Speaker, I also contend that the time has come to pay pensions, not just to spouses between ages 60 and 65 but to all people between ages 60 and 65 provided they meet just one test—that they are out of the labour market. That would cover all the people this bill covers, but it would also cover the spinsters, widows, bachelors and widowers, those who never married or are no longer married. I contend that the complaints that these people will be making in the months and years ahead—I hope it is only months, and not years—will be more than justified.

The hon. member of Hamilton West and one of my friends further down the aisle dealt with this matter in a question the other day and raised one point which I think really brings this bill to the test. Take the case of a woman aged 62 who is married to a man aged 65 or over. They have no income, so they qualify for the double pension. Next year he dies, when she is 63. What happens to the woman then? Is the Government of Canada going to be so inhuman as to take away the pension she was getting?

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Under this bill it would.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): My hon. friend is correct; under this bill the government will have to take it away. I suppose it will say it will have to take it away because if it did not, one widow would be getting it while thousands of other widows would not. I submit that test by itself shows that the thinking about this bill has not been adequate and that we need to make real improvements when we get it into committee.

Mr. Speaker, I welcome any bill that moves in the right direction, and this one does. I also welcome the opportunity to argue for further improvements in our old age pension legislation so that we may soon reach the day when our senior citizens have the rights and security to which they are entitled.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

● (1440)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Laprise (Abitibi): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I want to take part in this debate on Bill C-62, a bill we had been awaiting impatiently because we had noted that the government—the Liberal party rather—had promised as early as during the last election campaign of 1974 that this legislation would be passed as soon as the Liberal party would be reelected. Well, Mr. Speaker, this legislation will be implemented only a year and a half after the Liberal party's reelection. So, the minister should not be surprised if during its consideration either in committee or on second reading amendments are introduced to implement that election promise made by the Liberal party in 1974.

There is another point that was just raised by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), namely the case of those people who would momentarily be covered by this bill, that is spouses between the ages of 60 and 65. In the event the older spouse should die—a question raised by my colleague from Bellechasse (Mr. Lambert) a few days ago—the younger spouse would automatically be disentitled to his or her pension. That is another subject on which we are considering moving an amendment to improve this bill.

Generally speaking, the principle of the bill is quite acceptable, and I am one of the first to welcome it since as early as 1966 I was I think the first member in the history of Canadian parliamentarism to place a motion on the order paper of this House asking precisely that the spouse receive the pension, no matter what the age.

In every ensuing session I tabled the same motion since I was not entitled to introduce a bill to that effect and I had the opportunity a few times to debate that motion during private members' hour. On every occasion, as strange as it seems, government members always opposed such a move saying that it was nonsense, that it was going to be extremely expensive, that the people of Canada could not afford such a luxury. And still, on the last occasion, March 24, 1975, there was a perceptible change in attitude since at that time the government had already made public its intention of implementing this bill.

Now that this bill is being introduced, Liberal members and the government all agree. And that measure no longer is nonsense, on the contrary it makes sense. Just have a look at the memo or release which was handed to us on June 3, which says that, for instance, this new bill might benefit from 65,000 to 90,000 spouses. You will admit it makes quite a difference whether it is 65,000 or 90,000 spouses. Apparently, the department officials were unable to come up with a more precise figure. And yet, when costs are mentioned, they are said to amount to $100 million. Therefore, whether the number of spouses who will qualify is 65,000 or 90,000, the overall cost will be $100 million.

So I do not quite understand the figures of the minister's officials which leave such a wide gap between the estimate of the number of spouses who might qualify under the new act and the estimate of the costs. I think this calls for some explanation.

Mr. Speaker, the Social Credit Party has long called for improvements to the Old Age Security Act. In his statement this morning, the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde) said that when only one of the spouses is in receipt of the Old Age Security Pension, they have financial problems, and his attention was drawn many times to that.

And indeed we drew his attention to that problem many times. On December 3, 1974, I once again raised that matter in this House on the occasion of a debate on the business of supply, and I proposed:

> That this House regrets that the government neglected to make all those who reached the age of 60, as well as their spouses although such