

Private Members' Business

technical difficulties within the Department of National Health and Welfare, the man has been without support.

This is the kind of amendment that will hopefully cause the Department of National Health and Welfare to be just a little more sensitive to the real condition that exists out there. When someone in our community ends up totally disabled, his wife and family sit without any income and have to ultimately resort to welfare.

I want to say to my neighbour, the member for Don Valley East, good work. I thank you for having this opportunity.

Mr. Rey Pagtakhan (Winnipeg North): Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak today on Bill C-280, an act to amend the Canada Pension Plan Act respecting disability pension benefits. It is a bill long overdue, but doomed to impotency by this government over the past several years.

I therefore salute the member for Don Valley East for having the commitment, the courage and the conscience to buck the opponents of this bill in the past, particularly those from within his own political party. Those detractors must have clicked their heels for joy when Bill C-280 was deemed non-votable.

Although we must not overlook the role of the departmental bureaucracy in hindering this bill, I must admit that it would never be a stumbling block if the minister were to muster the will to effect a change. Has the meaning of ministerial responsibility been forgotten, I ask.

Allow me to reflect at this juncture on my disappointment at the decision to make this bill non-votable initially. I think we have found some remedy today. To have made this bill non-votable, if we had insisted on that and not referred it to the committee, would have made a mockery of Parliament. It would have made a mockery because a non-votable bill would seem to have passed judgment that the bill would never see the light of day. In a sense it would truly have curtailed the privileges and rights of members of Parliament.

The member for Don Valley East has tried for six years to help those denied their rightful CPP benefits. I share that sentiment. The wrongs looked as though they would

be righted before the 1988 election when he received the co-operation of the former minister of health, then the member for Provencher in my home province of Manitoba, but the issue has since been buried by subsequent ministers of health.

The perfect opportunity occurred on October 24 when this government through its present minister tabled in this House Bill C-39.

Nowhere in this legislation was there any mention of waiving the application deadline for disability benefits. In fact the deadline was tightened from one year to 90 days.

I believe the deadline for CPP applications should be irrelevant, as long as the claimant has medical certification to prove he is eligible for disability benefits and can show he meets the minimum contribution requirements as required by the act.

I am furious that this bill was hamstrung by people who cannot see the pain of those who fell through the cracks of the Canada Pension Plan bureaucracy.

Every member of Parliament in this House has constituents who have fallen through the cracks. For whatever reason, these workers had hoped their disability would disappear, and therefore did not file sooner.

They believe in a work ethic. Some were able financially to weather the initial phase of disability. It therefore came as a surprise to most of them when the disability became an unavoidable reality and when they found they were late. They were told they no longer had the benefits.

I believe people who have paid into the Canada Pension Plan have developed an inherent right to that plan. Is it not penalty enough to be disabled and lose your job, without suffering the added injustice of being denied your right to disability benefits?

Instead of denying benefits to disabled people, this government should spend time managing the Canada Pension Plan better so that we can get the greatest financial returns, and thereby return better benefits to Canadian citizens.

I would have liked to revisit the debate on Bill C-39. I would like to be short in this debate, but I would like to indicate that indeed I am pleased that this bill is now before us.