

The Standing Senate Committee on Health, Welfare and Science

Evidence

Ottawa, Thursday, May 18, 1972.

The Standing Senate Committee on Health, Welfare and Science, to which was referred Bill C-207, to amend the Old Age Security Act, met this day to give consideration to the bill.

Senator Maurice Lamontagne (*Chairman*) in the Chair.

The Chairman: Honourable senators, I see a quorum. We will come to order.

Senator Flynn: I am not sure that there is a quorum.

Mr. E. Russell Hopkins, Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel: Senator Flynn, Rule 67(k) reads, in part, as follows:

(k) The Senate Committee on Health, Welfare and Science, composed of thirty members, seven of whom shall constitute a quorum, to which—

and so on.

Senator Flynn: May I look at that, please?

Mr. Hopkins: Certainly.

Senator Flynn: All right. We can proceed now.

The Chairman: Before we proceed with the clause-by-clause study of this bill I should like those who have general comments to make about it to make them at this stage. After that we can proceed clause by clause. That is my proposal.

Senator Flynn: I have no objection to the idea of those who have general comments making them now, but as to proceeding clause by clause, is that necessary?

The Chairman: Well, we have to do this in committee. I prefer to give more freedom to members of the committee to make general comments before calling each clause.

Senator Flynn: May I make a comment which will be in the form of a question? I made my position quite clear, that I wanted to know why we would have to pass this bill so quickly, because it has been suggested that if the bill does not receive royal assent tomorrow it is obvious it cannot receive royal assent tonight. It would be difficult to find His Excellency the Governor General or a deputy to come over right away for royal assent, although possibly the Leader of the Government could arrange that also; he has infinite resources.

The Chairman: This is beyond his power.

Senator Flynn: I would not say that. He will hold it against you. I am wondering whether royal assent being given Friday evening will really make a difference in sending out the cheques to the pensioners.

Senator Martin: It will for the month of June.

Senator Flynn: No, let us say royal assent is given on Tuesday next. There are only three days in which no work is performed on Parliament Hill. Is anyone in a position to give an explanation on this particular point?

The Chairman: Dr. Willard, the Deputy Minister (National Welfare) of the Department of National Health and Welfare and his colleagues are with us, and I am sure that they can answer this question.

Dr. J. W. Willard, Deputy Minister (Welfare), Department of National Health and Welfare: Mr. Chairman, first of all I would like to introduce the officials who are with me this evening. To my right is Mr. Yeomans, Assistant Deputy Minister of the Department of Supply and Services. That department is involved with the question of getting cheques out to pensioners. To his right is Mr. Bergevin, the Senior Assistant Deputy Minister in charge of operations for the Department of National Health and Welfare (Welfare). On his right is Mr. Blais, the Assistant Deputy Minister of Income Security, who is directly responsible for administering the old age pension program. To his right is Mr. du Plessis, a legal adviser from the Department of Justice.

The Chairman: That list should satisfy you.

Dr. Willard: I will call upon some of these gentlemen to supplement my remarks from time to time.

After the budget was announced the minister asked me when the new rates could be implemented. I indicated that it would be June or July, depending upon when the legislation was passed. He asked me what the latest date would be if the cheques were to go out in June. I consulted with Mr. Bergevin, who is the Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Program Operations, and he in turn consulted with Mr. Yeomans and Mr. Blais, and we can explain the reasons we indicated to the minister, and he in turn to the government, why May 19 was a very critical date from our standpoint. That is the date we would wish to see legislation passed if we are going to put out June cheques rather than July cheques.

I would like to indicate that the size of the operation we are facing in order to get these cheques out is large indeed. We have 1,800,000 people to deal with across the country, about 800,000 are receiving OAS pensions and around 1 million of them are receiving OAS and GIS payments. Some of these are partial pension payments and some are full pension payments. The legislation provides for retroactivity, and this complicates the process in terms of how we make the adjustment of our records. I would