

Government Orders

respect of Canadians. It is because what we do here is not always in the best interests of Canadians.

What this amendment seeks to do in a very small way in that respect is to change the opinion that Canadians have of what we do here. It sees a flaw and it sees an easy way to fix it by amending this particular piece of legislation that is before us.

Every member here has had the same experience as I have had as a member of Parliament or as an assistant to a member of Parliament. Every one of us here has seen those people who are down on their luck who come into our offices and strip themselves of their dignity and cry at our desk because they do not have money. They are eligible for a program but because the bureaucracy is not allowed to move as quickly as it could and wants to, you have to tell them they have to wait another 45 days before anything can be processed on their application. You tell them they have to go and stand in that ever-increasing line-up at the welfare office. What is happening in welfare offices in places like Dartmouth and Glace Bay and Toronto and Montreal is that the municipalities do not have the money any more. Two million people have been forced on to municipal welfare in this country.

First the individual feels bad because they cannot contribute because they are ill or because they cannot work. They do not feel they can contribute. They make an application for a benefit they deserve, that they paid into and that most likely they will qualify for. In the interim they might as well be on Mars. They become a part of that faceless, hopeless group of Canadians who are pushed away from the table when they fall on hard times.

The amendment that is put forward here will seek a redress and relatively quickly. It will demand that the application process be speeded up. It will allow those individuals to maintain their dignity, those who find themselves for whatever reason unable to pursue gainful occupation and making an application to Canada pension.

I look across at the parliamentary secretary over there and I know she is listening and I am sure she has the same concerns. We all deal with people. We are here to work for the people. We are here to ensure that we have legislation that is responsive to the needs of the people. There are people out there who face a bleak winter. There are people out there who face bleak springs, summers and falls.

This amendment is a minor thing. It is not going to break the bank. This minor amendment would significantly shorten the period of response and would allow those individuals who need the help the most to be processed in an expeditious manner. The decision can be handed down and they can get on with their lives.

I hope this amendment is not dismissed out of hand. I hope everybody out there watching understands what we are talking about. We are talking about instilling a little bit of fairness into a piece of legislation. This is not a partisan thing. Fairness should know no political boundaries in this House.

What the hon. member for Cape Breton—East Richmond has simply sought to do is to instil a little bit of sanity into how we do our business. He has pointed out an obvious problem with the Canada pension legislation. He has put forward a very doable situation. This is a fundamental issue of human dignity which we are addressing with this amendment. As we vote on this later I hope when we look around this House that we will see our responsibilities to our own constituents and to every Canadian, most particularly those Canadians who need this legislation. I hope we will not fall into our old partisan jackets, suits and dresses and defeat this amendment which will improve this bill and make us all feel that we have served our constituents a little better.

Mrs. Barbara Sparrow (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Health and Welfare): Madam Speaker, I listened very carefully with regard to these amendments by the hon. member for Cape Breton—East Richmond.

First, I really want to commend by colleague from Kootenay East with regard to his contributions at the committee level. Madam Speaker, what you said a few minutes ago about voting these four or five amendments as a group was an explanation of the procedure. There are a lot of us who do have common concerns and would like to see the changes. In order to have those go through the system it does take time.

I share your concerns that we give hopes and prayers for people out there when the system takes longer than we all want it to take.

The hon. House leader for the Official Opposition made some very kind comments about the public servants in the Department of National Health and Welfare. I will certainly see that those remarks are forwarded.