

Government Orders

This is a complicated place. We all have areas of responsibility but those members who were on duty on these bills, who stand up and vote on these bills, have at least some responsibility to try to grasp what the amendment is about and to have someone in their caucus do Parliament and the people the courtesy of trying to deal with the substance of the amendment.

It is not just us who stand here and move these amendments. There are people who have worked days upon days on these amendments and the ideas contained within them. They reflect genuine concerns.

For example, why is it that the government has left in this bill the power of Treasury Board to deem an ex-spouse deceased when she or he is obviously very much alive and kicking? There is an iniquitous turn of phrase in this legislation, an iniquitous power that the government should have the right to deem someone dead to do them out of a survivor benefit.

That is just the language. Look at the substance of the issue on survivor's benefits. The way the law works and the government has refused to address it in this bill is that when a marriage breaks down and the member of the plan enters a new relationship and then dies, the entire survivor benefit goes to the second spouse or second partner. The original partner, who may have been with the member of the plan for years upon years upon years, who in the other parts of the bill is understood to have contributed to the pension, is given nothing by way of contribution to the survivor's benefits and often is left in destitute circumstances.

The government has refused to speak on why it will not address this deep concern of ex-spouses expressed to individual members of Parliament, expressed to committees of this House and expressed through us in the opposition in amendments and speeches we have given. The government remains silent. It is an arrogance on the part of the government that it will not speak to these concerns of the Canadian people.

We are at the final stages of this debate. This bill was introduced in March. It was moved quickly through the House and through committee and the government is moving quickly to have it given third reading.

It has refused to engage in debating the issues. It has become a captive of Treasury Board. I ask any member of the government to pick up any one of those amendments and see if he or she can see some justice or justification in the amendment. Then ask those who are responsible for pushing this bill through Parliament why they did not respond. You can count on the fact that we will be back with further amendments and further legislation to correct the errors in this bill.

This bill is going through. It will go to the Senate in the next few days and become law. It contains much that is good but it is also a flawed bill. It is flawed in the way in which it turns over to Treasury Board and to cabinet responsibilities which should properly be those of Parliament.

It is flawed in the way it has responded to the justice and the claim of those whose rights are dealt with under the bill. It is therefore a bill we will be voting against, with some reluctance because of the good that it contains.

However I say to those who have worked hard on this bill that we will be with them in keeping an eye on the administration of the bill, and see how it works out. We will ask them to keep in touch with us so that we can begin building a file for amendments and changes down the road, because as surely as we are here today the failure of the government to listen to those who came before the committee, the failure of the government to listen to those who applied their minds to this bill and spoke to the people of Canada on it, will come back to haunt this House and we will be obliged within a very short period of time to once again deal with it.

Mr. Pat Nowlan (Annapolis Valley—Hants): Mr. Speaker, I want to compliment the hon. member for Victoria on his review of the bill and some of its problems. His little vignette of history was interesting. I happened to be sitting here when his father was here, Andrew Brewin from Toronto Greenwood I believe. He was from the heartland, the core, the queen city or whatever you call Toronto. I do not know how the son got out to Victoria, but certainly having been there and practised law myself in Vancouver—he certainly saw a better way in the west and I welcome him back here to the central part.