

Old Age Security Act Amendment

of that number. Certainly the province of Nova Scotia is not a province that in any way would be affected because it does not provide any supplementation for old age security recipients.

The fact is that generally speaking provinces have not moved into this field because of the relatively small number of pensioners receiving supplementation—60,000 out of 1,200,000. This is, of course, an important group and we have framed the legislation in such a way that our benefits will still be available even though recipients are receiving provincial supplementation.

In reply to the question of the hon. member, the province of Prince Edward Island has not asked for removal of the income test and the province of British Columbia has not either. I think the latter province was concerned about the application of the legislation to their program of supplementation, but I would have to re-read the correspondence to determine whether there was an actual request for removal of the test. I do not think that generally there was.

Mr. McCleave: May I put one short question? I take it that the correspondence was initiated by the provincial governments concerned, not by the minister?

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Chairman, I have initiated correspondence with all the ministers of health. I sent them copies of the bill, explained the program and indicated my readiness to explain it further. Questions have been asked especially by the province of British Columbia.

Mr. McCleave: This was after the legislation had been introduced in this chamber?

Mr. MacEachen: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Bell (Carleton): Mr. Chairman, I understand the reluctance of the minister to accept the situation with regard to supplementation by the provinces. Even though I may not sympathize with the point of view he expresses, there may at least have been some degree of consistency. But there is none, I venture to suggest, in respect of the important matter which has been raised by the hon. member for Churchill. I think the hon. member raised a very important point, because control in relation to supplemental payments is under the same authority represented by the minister. It is a question of one minister, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern

Development, versus another, the Minister of National Health and Welfare.

Either tonight or before this bill receives third reading the minister must give us the positive assurance that in relation to this particular matter the supplemental payments which may be made by the department of Indian affairs will not in any way be interfered with. There is a simple situation involved here. The minister needs only to look to his left hand, or indeed to his right hand I suppose, having regard to his position, to get a positive and definite assurance in this regard. Without that assurance I venture to suggest that we can have no confidence that the minister will, in his relations with the provinces, seek to ensure that supplemental payments are not affected.

Here is a matter that is under the control of this parliament, so let us make it clear and definite. The minister can settle the matter raised by the hon. member for Churchill, tonight, but he will certainly have to give this assurance before we proceed on third reading.

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Chairman, I did agree to speak to the minister about this question and I will give whatever information I can to the committee. The committee can then determine whether my information meets the situation.

Mr. Fane: Mr. Chairman, I have one or two other matters I want to put before the minister. First of all, may I say how strongly I support what was said by the hon. member for Churchill, who was aided and abetted so ably by the hon. member for Carleton. I have an Indian reserve in my constituency and these particular Indians will be very much interested in what is going to happen to the supplemental pensions and other forms of relief provided.

I also want to tell the minister that in some of the cases where provincial governments make supplemental payments to the recipients of old age security there are bound to be double payments. I should like to ask the minister whether he contemplates allowing deductions to be made by the provinces for what they allege are overpayments.

In the past I know that this practice has been frowned upon but it has been allowed. I think the minister should assure the committee that these deductions will not be made from the increased payments authorized under this amending bill. This is something which I think is very important. If these people find that \$30, \$60 or \$120 is going to be