

*Superannuation*

abolition of guaranteed indexing for public service pensions.

Reform of public service pensions is long overdue. Reform must address all of these issues through a system of joint management with equal representation from employees, present retirees, and management. However, it must make no attempt to deny or withhold full and guaranteed pension indexing for all present and future public service superannuants. On the whole this Bill before the House is desirable, but in my remarks I have attempted to show some of the matters we should look at in the future.

**Hon. Gerald S. Merrithew (Minister of Veterans Affairs):** Mr. Speaker, it is certainly not my intention to hold up unduly the debate and timely passage of this Bill today, but I want to thank my colleague, the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. de Cotret), and indeed all my colleagues for their co-operation in ensuring that a number of spouses of veterans will also benefit from this welcome legislation.

The House will know that pensions are paid to veterans and their survivors as compensation for death and disability incurred during wartime service or as compensation for the time spent as a prisoner of war. As is the custom in a number of programs, remarriage causes surviving spouses to forfeit ongoing pension rights. In the case of our veterans, we are more generous in that we give a one year lump sum to the surviving spouse before the pension is terminated. Of course, this was a special privilege awarded to survivors of that very special group of Canadians, our veterans.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, the amendments made to the Pension Act by Bill C-24 will not only help surviving spouses but will also protect the pension rights of children, brothers and sisters under 25 who choose to marry.

[*English*]

We estimate that an average number of 100 surviving spouses of pension veterans remarry each year. In addition, those who have lost their pension over the years through remarriage will, of course, be eligible to apply for reinstatement. We estimate there are some 4,500 surviving spouses in this position. Once this legislation is passed we will do everything we can to let them know the good news. We estimate the cost to be approximately \$28 million annually.

In conclusion, I very much appreciate the co-operative gesture that has been made by both opposition Parties so that we will have swift passage of this piece of important legislation. It will certainly give great comfort to our veterans and indeed to other retired members of the Public Service.

**Mr. Crosby:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I understand from discussions that if you were to ask you would find unanimous consent to have this Bill referred to Committee of the Whole House immediately upon completion of debate, and officials could be invited to appear before the House at that time. Possibly the Hon. Member for Ottawa-Vanier could indicate whether that is his position.

**Mr. Gauthier:** Mr. Speaker, we agree to proceed with all stages of this Bill today, including third reading.

**Mr. Riis:** Mr. Speaker, we encourage support of that suggestion. We have a number of questions to put to the Minister, so I think it would be in order to move to Committee of the Whole as soon as possible.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa-Vanier):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in this debate. As was just said, an Opposition Member does not often have the opportunity to say that legislation under consideration is good, that we support it without any reservation and that for once the Government is presenting legislation that we think corrects existing inequities in the laws and that perhaps it should have made these corrections years ago.

I think this Bill C-24, after too much delay, rectifies some discriminatory sections in the pension legislation.

Mr. Speaker, the allowances now paid to surviving spouses of government pensioners, whether they were Public Service employees, veterans, Members of Parliament, Senators or members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, cease when they remarry; allowances paid to surviving children aged 18 to 25 who are students cease when they (re)marry.

In some cases, the allowances paid to the surviving spouse are reduced if the surviving spouse is more than 20 years younger than the contributor. The Bill before us corrects these inequities. Bill C-24 eliminates these sections. Allowances will continue to be paid to a surviving spouse who remarries. Surviving children aged 18 to 25 who are full-time students in a school or university continue and will continue to receive the allowances to which they are entitled, even if they marry.