

*Government Orders*

I would hope that the government would support this amendment and would impose this discipline on itself. I would ask the government and all the members opposite to consider if there is any doubt about whether or not it will support these amendments. It should ask itself what is the signal that it will send to Canadians if it refuses to impose this very modest discipline of a 30-day turnaround on itself.

What the signal will be is that there are other priorities more important than providing prompt and efficient service to those Canadians who need that service. When they come forward with a claim for disability benefits or pension benefits of that kind that ought to be the government's first and foremost priority. If the government does not accept this amendment I would suggest that the signal that the government is sending to millions of Canadians who are in this situation every day is that something else is more important than their welfare. I think that would be a tragic signal for any government to send to its citizens.

**Mr. Ron MacDonald (Dartmouth):** Madam Speaker, I want to first off say that I commend our House leader, the member for Cape Breton—East Richmond. We go back a long way. His interest in Canada pension and the process is well founded.

Back in 1980 he was just a rookie and I was just a pup. I actually worked in his office. I can tell this House the reason that this amendment is being brought forward. The coal fields of Cape Breton are a dangerous place to work. There are a lot of individuals who see their useful working lives shortened because of the extreme difficulties that they find themselves in because of the health problems that came from working bent over two miles underneath the ocean when old No. 26 was together and still operating.

• (1140)

Those individuals came from working class backgrounds. They did not have money in the bank. They did not have rich relatives that could come and look after them if they became disabled. They did not have wealthy annuities that they had put aside for dark days or for rainy days. They were plain, simple, hard-working individuals.

I do not think I was in the office of the hon. member for Cape Breton—East Richmond longer than a day back in 1980 when the first case came in and that first case dealt with Canada Pension Plan disability. I did not know very much about the system then but did I ever learn quickly. There were a lot of individuals there who had paid into the Canada Pension Plan and unfortunately had to avail themselves of those particular provisions for disability payments.

It is very easy for all of us to be smug up here in our ivory towers in Ottawa while we debate other issues that are equally important. It depends on who is speaking to the issue. As for these types of amendments—particularly the amendment that has been proposed by the member for Cape Breton—East Richmond—it is fine for us to say: "The government didn't think of it so we are not going to really do it right now". Besides it does not really affect a lot of people.

I am going to tell you, Madam Speaker, it affects an awful lot of people. You should see an individual that has been stripped of dignity, who has to sit in front of a member of Parliament or assistant to a member of Parliament, or any official and literally beg: "Please, can you make the one phone call and see what is happening here. I have no food for my children. I have nowhere to live. I cannot pay my modest mortgage payments anymore. Please, please see what you can do".

It is fine for us to sit here. The way that this place works is a little sickening at times. We have tried our very best. It is a little sickening at times because sometimes we get a little too partisan in here. Sometimes members of the opposition such as our House leader put forward amendments which are reasoned, appropriate, practical and which fix problems with bills and makes better legislation. Then government members opposite sit there and say: "It may be a good idea and I know it will benefit my constituents and I know it is not going to have an undue draw on the treasury of the country, and I know it will make a better bill but I cannot support it because it did not come from my side of the House".

We have talked a lot in the last little while about decorum in this place and we have talked a lot about what it is that we do here and why we do not have the