

Government Orders

Responsibility for seniors is shared by two departments, Human Resources Development and Health, with the Seniors Secretariat, which is responsible for giving seniors the information they need on federal programs and services, while providing liaison with the federal and provincial departments responsible for programs for senior citizens. Why not have a minister responsible for senior citizens, like the previous government? I asked this question at the very beginning of my term as a member of this House.

In addition, the National Advisory Council on Aging advises the Minister of Health on the quality of life of senior citizens, either at the request of the minister or on its own initiative. The council's role consists in disseminating information and publishing reports, for instance. The federal government assists senior citizens mainly through two programs: Old Age Security and the Canada Pension Plan, and a number of tax measures.

The purpose of the OAS program is to provide seniors with a decent level of income. The program includes three kinds of benefits under the Old Age Security Act. The basic old age security pensions provide seniors with the basis for a decent level of income. Pensions are paid to all Canadians and Quebecers 65 years of age and over who meet residence requirements. They are taxable and subject to partial or full clawback in the case of seniors with high incomes.

The guaranteed income supplement ensures a minimum level of income to old age security pensioners. Benefits are paid to old age security pensioners who have a low or modest income. The amount of benefits is established through an assessment of annual income, generally based on the individual's income for the previous year as reported for tax purposes.

The spouses's allowance helps married, retired and low-income couples who receive only one old age security pension or guaranteed income supplement, as well as low-income widows and widowers, aged 60 to 64, who meet the old age security requirements in terms of residency. Benefits are determined through an income assessment similar to the one applicable to the guaranteed income supplement. The Canada Pension Plan is a mandatory and contributive social insurance program designed to protect Canadian workers and their families against a loss of income due to death, disability or retirement.

Retirement pension benefits are equal to 25 per cent of the pensionable earnings of the contributor, with this average being established for the net qualifying period. These benefits will help about 2 million pensioners each month, for a volume of transactions of \$9.6 billion in 1993-94. Survivor's benefits consist of a monthly benefit paid to surviving spouses of deceased contributors, an overall benefit paid to the succession and orphan benefits paid each month to children of deceased contributors. Benefits paid to surviving spouses are reduced if

spouses are aged 35 to 45, are not invalid or have no children. Disability payments are made monthly to contributors who have not yet reached 65 years old and have a chronic and serious disability and to their dependent children who are 18 years old or less or 18 to 25 if they are full time students. In 1993-94, approximately \$2.5 billion will be paid to 325,000 recipients every month.

● (1040)

Bill C-54 highlights contain, among other things, two specific amendments which will have a positive impact on the programs for the elderly and the amendments are the following.

Spouse's allowances automatically become old age security benefits when the recipients reach 65 years old. The guaranteed income supplement and spouse's allowances will be paid even when applications are late. The intent of the proposal is to amend the Old Age Security Act in order for the minister to be able to exempt some recipients from filing an annual application for the renewal of the guaranteed income supplement and spouse's allowances.

However, the Bloc Quebecois cannot support Bill C-54's provisions which change access to some information, since the government wants to increase the number of departments, agencies and persons given access to personal information used in the administration of the acts amended by this bill.

According to the legislation as it stands now, the agencies having access to information are the departments of National Revenue, Finance and Supply and Services, the Employment and Immigration Commission, Statistics Canada and any provincial authorities administering an assistance program. These agencies do have access providing the information deals only with the status of recipients or the amount of the benefits or where disclosure of information is required for the purposes of administering the act.

We must be careful when gathering personal information on elderly people, because this can be used for other purposes. We must protect them from possible abuse. The government has not demonstrated that privileged information disclosure was required and essential. The government must always be accountable to elderly people by showing that the gathering of such information is not abusive.

Governments are encroaching more and more on the private lives of people, as we saw recently in the Grant Bristow case. Furthermore, the Bloc Quebecois does not accept the clauses providing for sanctions in case of illegal communication because they do not go far enough.

Also the bill's clauses relating to information add the following agencies to the list of those who can have access to that