

Government Orders

I must tell you that in an issue like this in which families are depending on that cheque for their groceries, never mind their Christmas presents, and to keep their heat on or to keep their rent going, it is very tough to understand why public officials give these disabled applications what I call the "mad" treatment, maximum administrative delay.

Somehow, as we are crafting this legislation, this amendment has to be worked into the bill so that public servants who administer this law understand that while they may be pushing paper there is deep pain at the other end.

My colleague from Cape Breton said this so well earlier. I would not call it dramatic when he is talking about fact, when he is talking about the numerous cases in which the paper just sits and sits and sits. It is one month then two, and then it is one year, then three. Somehow we have to get the system moving more quickly.

I would urge the parliamentary secretary to please consider this amendment seriously.

Mr. Francis G. LeBlanc (Cape Breton Highlands—Canso): Madam Speaker, I would like to add my words of support to the amendment that was introduced by my colleague, the hon. member for Cape Breton—East Richmond, and to which he so eloquently spoke a few minutes ago.

My colleague is right and he was not over-dramatizing the suffering that occurs with people who are disabled and who are waiting and waiting for some answer from the government concerning whether they are going to get their disability benefits.

Let us look at it from the point of view of so many people who come to my constituency office, to his constituency office and to the constituency offices of virtually every member in this House to find out what is happening with their claims, with their applications, for disability benefits.

Many people who are disabled do not come unless they sincerely believe that they are disabled because for them, very often, it is a real source of shame to have to admit that they are disabled and that they have to go for help.

These people have all kinds of time to think about their condition and to wait for the answer. The torture of their condition is augmented each day they wait and do not hear an answer. They have to go and find out by calling their local MP or by making the long trip to a Canada pension office to find out what is happening with their claim or their appeal.

For people in rural areas that is a long trip. That is a great deal of inconvenience for them.

This causes great suffering and great stress in addition to the stress that the disability—or the knowledge that one is potentially not quite disabled enough to satisfy the law—has on the problems that these people face.

My colleague from Cape Breton—East Richmond is not exaggerating. The suffering caused by these delays is real. The human costs are incalculable. It behoves a government concerned about its people and those who are least able to take care of themselves to be concerned with providing service. It behoves the government concerned with that to do all it can to ensure that these delays are minimized to the maximum extent possible.

I think that this amendment is a very useful way of disciplining the government and disciplining the bureaucracy which does its best. They are dedicated civil servants who work hard and who have the concerns of those people that come before them in the form of an application or an appeal. They have those concerns at heart.

They have piles of other work to do. If there is no discipline such as that which a deadline always imposes, it is very easy for these delays to perpetuate. It is a natural part of the bureaucratic process that if it is not the most important thing on your agenda that particular day then it will wait. The person at the other end of the file, the claimant, the unwed mother, or the senior citizen, or the disabled person who is home waiting to hear from the government is there without an answer.

I think the discipline which Motion No. 5A provides to the government and to the bureaucracy is very healthy. It also signals a priority. It tells the people of Canada that this government is concerned and has their welfare first and foremost in the administration of the services that it provides. The most crucial service is a basic source of income for people who are in one way or another unable to work or provide that income for themselves.