

Motion agreed to.

● (1540)

[English]

PUBLIC PENSIONS REPORTING BILL

SECOND READING

Hon. Brenda M. Robertson moved the second reading of Bill C-255, to impose reporting requirements with respect to public pension plans and to amend certain Acts in consequence thereof.

She said: Honourable senators, this week a private member's bill received House of Commons approval, the first time in 11 years that such a bill has been so blessed. Bill C-255 was introduced by Paul McCrossan, P.C., York-Scarborough, a Toronto actuary. The bill requires the government to give a regular public accounting of its financial commitments to public pensions. It requires that the Minister of Finance table triennial actuarial valuations of pension plans established under the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act, the Members of Parliament Retiring Allowances Act, the Public Service Superannuation Act and the Supplementary Retirement Benefits Act. It also requires an actuarial valuation of the Canada Pension Plan every three years instead of every five years as is now the case. It also requires a detailed estimate of benefits payable under the Old Age Security Act.

Such reporting, honourable senators, has been called for by the Auditor General and a Special Parliamentary Committee on Pension Reform. The bill was introduced early this year and was referred to a legislative committee for study. The committee reported the bill to the House of Commons this week, and the bill was voted on and has the support of all parties. The McCrossan bill is regarded as a breakthrough for private members seeking to have legislation of their own making come before the House of Commons for debate and approval. The move is in keeping with the parliamentary reforms recommended by the Special Committee on Reform of the House of Commons which, last year, recommended the strengthening of the role of the private member of Parliament.

Perhaps in clear terms, this bill requires the government to file, for the first time, the estimated costs of the OAS, the Guaranteed Income Supplement and spouses' benefits. The Auditor General devoted an entire section of his most recent report expressing his concern that MPs do not have adequate information to assess the public pension programs, and calling for increased periodic disclosure of the ultimate costs of OAS and CPP programs, as provided for in this bill. The bill also ensures that government employees have full disclosure of the full and true costs of their benefits.

Bill C-255 was enthusiastically supported by both Liberal and NDP spokesmen, who referred to the expertise Mr. McCrossan could bring in ensuring that MPs receive current and adequate information about government pension commitments.

Honourable senators, if you have had the opportunity of reading Bill C-255, you will have noticed that there is an excellent explanation for each clause; however, because it is a

[The Hon. the Speaker.]

technical bill, and because I am not sure how much we know about these matters—I confess myself that I have not studied these matters in detail—I suggest that the bill be referred to the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology. I understand that Senator McElman has a few comments to add, but certainly if that is the wish of the Senate, I would be prepared to move that it be referred to that committee.

Hon. Charles McElman: Honourable senators, I thank Senator Robertson for her concise explanation of the bill. It is a rather extraordinary circumstance by which it reaches us. As Senator Robertson explained, Mr. McCrossan, a private member, brought this before the other house, and he does have a great deal of expertise in this field.

The bill, as originally presented for first reading, received a very careful study in committee of the other place, and it was extensively amended, but not in principle; it was a matter of the bureaucrats advising how it could be put in better form for its administration.

Senator Robertson is quite right when she said that the bill did receive the enthusiastic support of all three parties in the House of Commons. In fact, debate on third reading took place not only in one day, but in a rather short period of time.

This bill, unquestionably, will improve the reporting procedures to Parliament with respect to pension programs that Parliament has put in place, and it will be to the benefit of Parliament to have a more thorough financial accounting, on an actuarial basis, of how these programs are being carried forward. So, the effects of the bill can be only beneficial.

I subscribe to the proposal made by Senator Robertson that the bill be referred to the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, for a number of reasons. First of all, I hold to the view that most bills, unless they are bills of absolute simplicity, should be referred to committees. I do not think consideration by that committee will take too long, but the bill should be referred to that committee.

That is all one need say without repeating the words of the sponsor of the bill.

Motion agreed to and bill read second time.

● (1550)

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

The Hon. the Speaker *pro tempore*: Honourable senators, when shall this bill be read the third time?

On motion of Senator Robertson, bill referred to the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology.

The Senate adjourned during pleasure.

At 5.45 p.m. the sitting of the Senate was resumed.