

Federal Sales Tax

and drive such vehicles unassisted; Braille printers and large-print devices enabling persons with severe visual handicaps to use home computers; speech synthesizers enabling the deaf to speak with the help of a portable keyboard, TV closed-caption decoders for the deaf; monitoring devices to be attached to babies identified as being susceptible to the crib death syndrome.

Furthermore, since 1986 the federal Government has increased amounts paid to individuals receiving disability benefits under the Canada Pension Plan. In 1986, the maximum disability pension was \$455.64 per month; in 1987, it will go up to \$634.09, an increase of \$178.45 per month, or 39 per cent. Some 15,000 people will be able to take advantage of this increase in the Canada Pension Plan disability benefits.

Veterans' pensions and allowances have also been increased. Once more, nearly 150,000 pensioners will benefit.

These measures clearly show that the Government is concerned about the ability of the disabled and those on whom they depend for financial support to pay taxes.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, devices for the specific and exclusive use of the disabled are now exempt from the sales tax. In addition, medical expenses are now deductible and will be the subject of a tax credit after the reform. Finally, the disability deduction, which will be transformed into a tax credit, has been considerably improved. Taken together, these measures are of considerable benefit to the disabled. The initiatives taken since 1984 to improve these benefits show that this Conservative Government is concerned about the needs of the disabled. This commitment is also reflected in the tax reform proposals. While other improvements may be necessary, those are achievements of which all Canadians can be very proud.

● (1820)

[*English*]

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina West): Mr. Speaker, I rise to express general support and even sympathy for the resolution of the Hon. Member for Nepean—Carleton (Mr. Tupper). However, with all respect, I think he is attacking the problem in the wrong way.

Whether it is people who are disabled, war veterans, or old age pensioners who are eligible for the guaranteed income supplement, surely our tax laws should provide that they have an exemption. I realize that it is difficult to keep track of; I mean, we do not want to be handing out special identification cards like the KGB and the SS used to do.

I recall the last Budget of the present Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Turner) which implemented a 10-cent per gallon excise tax on gasoline. In committee of the whole I moved amendments to exempt senior citizens who were eligible for the guaranteed income supplement, war veterans, and the disabled from that tax. The then Minister of Finance, the present Leader of the Official Opposition, was kind enough to

send me a note across the floor asking me to resubmit an amendment providing for a rebate of the 10-cents per gallon gasoline tax for the disabled.

Like my hon. friend, I have a number of constituents who have specially equipped cars. The municipality or charitable organizations run buses, vans, or specially equipped station wagons. It provided them with an opportunity to make application for a full refund of that 10 cents per gallon excise tax on gasoline.

It worked during 1977 and 1978. I wish my hon. friend—and I really think he has a good idea in his motion—would talk to his own colleagues first. The 1979 Budget of the then Minister of Finance, the present Minister of Transport (Mr. Crosbie), cancelled the 10 per cent rebate of the excise tax on gasoline for the disabled.

We have done enough playing around with this sort of thing. Even the tax reform announcements of last Thursday did not cover old age pensioners who are eligible for GIS—and surely they must be the poorest of our elderly—those on war veteran's pensions, and those who are disabled, in any so-called sales tax reform. I do not think there is any disagreement about it among all Parties in this place. There should be no argument. It should not require a motion from a member of any Party. It should not require a Private Member's Bill or a Private Member's Motion.

I point this out, not to be vindictive, not to try to make political points, or anything else. It seems to me that there should be no argument or question about the matter. It should be automatic in the head space of Ministers of Finance and those guys in the nether regions of the Department of Finance and the Department of National Revenue. No discussion should be necessary.

In part my hon. friend's motion says that "the Government should consider the advisability of introducing a measure". I do not think anyone in this place would argue against that. However, why should we be required to present it? It should be a matter of course, no matter what political Party is in power.

● (1830)

I hope my hon. friend's motion passes because it carries the weight of all Members of this place. I hope that he and his colleagues can have some influence on the people who advise and do White Papers et cetera, et cetera for the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson). The real test of any society is how well it treats its sick, its old, its veterans and its disabled.

If you examine countries all around the world, you will find that Canada does not do too bad a job, Mr. Speaker. In fact, we do fairly well. But what about this sitting around resting on our laurels with paltry sums? What about those who are maimed from birth, maimed by accident, those who have occupied hospital beds since the Second World War and/or those who have earned their retirement and who only get the Old Age Pension and the Guaranteed Income Supplement?