

*Pensions Act*

LaMarsh for the second reading of Bill No. C-125, to amend the Old Age Assistance Act, the Disabled Persons Act and the Blind Persons Act.

**Hon. Judy V. LaMarsh (Minister of National Health and Welfare):** Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this bill is to increase from \$65 to \$75 the monthly benefits now being paid to some 162,000 Canadians under the categorical assistance programs which are shared by the dominion government with the provinces. I am sure that, especially at this time of year, this is a purpose which will commend itself to all hon. members on both sides of the house.

It will be noted that the effective date in the bill is shown as December 1, 1963. What this means is that the federal government will be ready to assume its share of the new increases on that date or any subsequent date that a province might choose to put them into operation. I might point out here that this date was selected after the fullest discussion of the matter at the recent federal-provincial conference held in Ottawa two weeks ago. Some provinces expressed the view that a later date might be more desirable, but none suggested an earlier date. It should be stressed that it will still be up to each particular province to decide when it wishes to implement the increases provided for in this bill. In this connection I might add that it will be necessary, on the basis of this bill as passed, to amend 36 separate agreements with the 10 provinces, the Yukon and the Northwest Territories.

Some hon. members will no doubt remark that in the past it has been customary to introduce separate amendments to provide increases in old age assistance and blind and disability allowances. It was the government's opinion that in view of the heavy pressure of impending legislation, we would save the house a considerable amount of time by including the three necessary amendments on this particular occasion in the one bill.

It is estimated that if all provinces choose to put the increases into effect on December 1 the added cost to the federal government for the current fiscal year will be \$4.2 million.

It will be noted that the bill will also raise the permissible incomes for the recipients under these shared programs. For an unmarried person receiving old age assistance or a disability allowance the permissible income will rise by \$120, from \$1,140 per year to \$1,260. For married persons in the same two categories the maximum permissible income will be increased by \$240, from \$1,980 to \$2,220.

In the matter of allowances to the blind, where the federal government pays 75 per

[Mr. Pickersgill.]

cent of the total as opposed to 50 per cent in the other two programs, the permissible incomes will also be raised by \$120 for unmarried persons and \$240 for married persons.

The latest figures in my department show that there are some 103,000 people receiving old age assistance, about 8,000 receiving blind allowances and 51,000 receiving disability allowances. As hon. members no doubt know, old age assistance is paid on a means test to those Canadians between 65 and 69 years of age whose income falls below a certain maximum. Blind and disability allowances are paid to blind and disabled persons from the age of 18.

I am sure the increased allowances provided for in this bill, combined with the old age security benefit which was also raised recently to \$75, will give our older Canadians and afflicted Canadians who suffer from various forms of disability a greater degree of security and comfort than they have ever had before. This is a fact from which all members of this house, all members of provincial legislatures, indeed all Canadians, can derive a certain measure of satisfaction. It does not mean, however, that we can rest upon our oars. We must continue to move ahead in every way we can to make life happier and healthier for those Canadians less fortunate than ourselves.

**Mr. Douglas:** Before the minister takes her seat I wonder whether she would answer a question. She gave a figure of \$4.2 million as the cost of the increase for the present fiscal year. Could she give the figure for a complete year? Does she have it handy?

**Miss LaMarsh:** I have it here somewhere. Perhaps my hon. friend will permit me to give it later.

**Mr. Douglas:** The minister can give it later. Would the minister repeat the figures she gave as to the number of persons in the various categories? She said there were 103,000 receiving old age assistance. What were the other two?

**Miss LaMarsh:** There are 8,000 receiving blind allowances and 51,000 receiving disability allowances.

**Hon. J. W. Monteith (Perth):** Mr. Speaker, this one bill covers three different acts. The minister has said that because of the time in the session when these amendments are being brought forward it is thought that this will save the time of the house. Personally I do not quarrel with the fact that it is being brought forward in this form as one bill; my chief concern is to see the legislation passed so that the people in these three categories will immediately begin to receive the benefits. The same result can be achieved in this way, but I feel that more particularized