

*Old Age Security Act*

It was then held by the present Member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Keeper). For some reason he decided to move to the constituency formerly held by the Hon. Stanley Knowles. Whatever were the reasons that made him decide this, it seems to have worked out well for both him and me.

● (1620)

Winnipeg-St. James is an urban riding. The Winnipeg International Airport is almost in the centre of my riding. As the Member of Parliament for Winnipeg-St. James, I cannot guarantee that I will welcome you every time you arrive there, even though that may be the custom. That gives a general idea of the location of our riding.

The riding is a good cross-section of Manitoba. Citizens of over 20 ethnic backgrounds form an integral part of the social fabric of Manitoba. Like most Manitobans, they are very hard working citizens. Some are long-time residents, some are immigrants, and some are new Canadian citizens. We have a good cross-section of the various citizens in our province in my riding.

We have blue collar workers, executives and free entrepreneurs, so we have a cross-section of the business community as well. Without getting you too excited, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that it is the home base of the Grey Cup champions for 1984, the Winnipeg Blue Bombers. I tried to congratulate them under Standing Order 21, and I almost got it through. At this time I would like to congratulate the Winnipeg Blue Bombers, the reigning Grey Cup champions.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Minaker:** I did not want to say that the Speaker used to be an Edmonton Eskimo. I am proud and privileged to represent Winnipeg-St. James. Having made those few comments, I would now like to speak to the Bill.

As a former Minister of Community Services in the Province of Manitoba, I had day-to-day contact with the very problem that this Bill will help to alleviate. I know the sincerity and commitment of the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp). I applaud him for the first step he has taken in alleviating the problem that exists for the 60 to 64 years olds in the low income bracket. I support his approach to consultation with the public and the provinces. The Hon. Member for Mount Royal (Mrs. Finestone) commented on the former Liberal Government consulting with the provinces and being leader in the consultation field. That was not the case when I was Minister of Community Services. If being called to a meeting, sitting at a table and having the federal Minister say what the Government was going to do is consultation, I will not agree. I know the present Health Minister will not follow that approach.

The objective of this Bill is to provide assistance to low income widowed persons in the 60 to 64 year age group who meet the same 10 year residence rule as other spouse's allowance recipients without regard to the age at which the spouse died. As a result of this reform in the present law, about 85,000 widowers and widows aged 60 to 64 will qualify. There

is a definite need for this. I understand that when this Bill is passed and the program comes into effect in September, about 61 per cent of the entire widowed population in that age group will qualify. This clearly indicates that there is a need in this area and we will be alleviating part of that need.

The maximum benefit will be \$536.26 per month and will be income tested. This reform will remove the inequities which currently exist in the treatment of low income widowed persons. It represents the next logical step in the provision of greater income assistance for the needy elderly. The proposal to extend the spouse's allowance was a firm commitment of our Party during the election. It was a promise in the Throne Speech. I am happy we are meeting that commitment. I congratulate the Minister on bringing forward the legislation at this time.

I wish to comment briefly on the general background of the development of pensions. I think it comes into play with what the Hon. Member for Hamilton Mountain (Mr. Deans) talked about. It has been accepted in the past and is at present that the federal Government has the prime responsibility for pensions such as the old age security, the guaranteed income supplement and the Canada Pension Plan. The reason is primarily the immense cost to fund these types of programs. The provincial Governments have taken on the share of responsibilities with the federal Government on other social services such as income security programs, welfare and rehabilitation. I am confident the Minister will look into these because there are now areas of responsibility being split and, in some cases, being duplicated.

What is the economic impact of our spouse's allowance program? I understand that in December, 1985 there will be some 93,681 recipients of the spouse's allowance with program costs in the area of \$11.5 billion. Therefore, it has a big economic impact on the budget of the Government of Canada. The proposed extension to all widows and widowers will be in the order of some \$350 million when the program is in the full year of operation. It has a fairly heavy economic impact on the Government's expenditures.

What are the long-term objectives for the low income single individual? We in this House would like to see the step taken whereby any single person between the ages of 60 and 64 and is needy will qualify. I am confident that the Minister will work to that end. It amplifies the problem which the Government faces. The Minister indicated many times in this House that we need economic growth in order to provide these extended services which all Members would like to see. It stresses the importance of our program of regaining confidence in this country by both investors and citizens so that we as private entrepreneurs can reinvest in creating jobs and creating the revenue for financing these programs.

We are all concerned about those who are not covered by this Bill. The low income person between the ages of 60 and 64 who may be single or divorced, and there are 80,000 such individuals, will continue to have assistance provided through provincial programs. I want to mention this because the Hon. Member for Hamilton Mountain hit on a fact of which many