

*Government Orders*

the fact is that there is a problem for some which is reason enough for this government to find alternatives.

An amendment to the Old Age Security Act contained in the bill would go a long way to alleviating these very real problems facing very real people. The amendment would give the Minister of Human Resources Development the authority to waive the requirement for an individual to reapply each year.

It will be some time before we are able to use this waiver extensively. However, some of the cases where this waiver could be used either immediately or in the very near future include the following: Pensioners whose income does not change from year to year, a situation common among more elderly seniors; pensioners whose only other source of income is the Canada pension plan, which means that my department already has the income information necessary to calculate the income tested benefits under the old age security program; and, pensioners who have already filed their income tax returns by the end of March.

For this group, the income information could be obtained directly from Revenue Canada. Obtaining information directly from Revenue Canada would do more than provide an improved client service. It would also reduce a great deal of duplication both for seniors and for the government. Seniors would no longer have to provide what is effectively the same information to two government departments. In turn, the role of the Department of Human Resources Development plays in the renewal process would become more efficient because it would get the correct information from Revenue Canada about an individual's income from the first.

This means that the underpayments and overpayments on many accounts would be eliminated. Efficiencies such as this would go a long way to streamlining service to the public, while at the same time reducing government expenditures. As well, there would be a reduction in the paper burden imposed on those who are least able to cope with it.

Other amendments in the bill would also have significant benefits for pensioners. The OAS appeal process is yet another example. It involves changes to the old age security appeal process. Currently any client dissatisfied with the decision under the OAS act may ask for a reconsideration which is an internal review of their file or the client can go directly to a review tribunal which is made up of three members, a representative of the client, a representative of the minister and a chair who is agreed by the other two.

• (1025)

There are a number of problems with this process which I feel the amendments will go a long way to alleviate. First we are proposing that the reconsideration stage be mandatory for all

appeals, so that clients would be assured of a speedy review of their case to ensure that the decision they originally received was in fact the correct one.

Experience has shown that reconsideration is the fastest way to change the original decision, especially if an error occurred or if there was simply something lacking in the documentation submitted the first time around. This happens when clients bring forward new information that was not available when the original decision was made.

Second, we are proposing to have all OAS review tribunals heard by the review tribunals correctly in place under the Canada pension plan. As I am sure hon. members can appreciate, it is often very difficult to find three volunteers who are all able to be at the same place at the same time, during business hours, particularly in remote locations. In fact there are currently appeals under the OAS program that have been waiting to be heard for more than two years.

By contrast the Canada pension plan review tribunals in place since 1992 are proving very efficient. These tribunals are composed of three members chosen from a panel appointed for just this purpose. As a result we have a significant number of people who are committed to be available to take part in the appeal process in all parts of this very large country.

As well, because members hear a number of appeals during their tenure, they develop a very good working knowledge of the program on which they are being asked to adjudicate.

On the issue of war crimes, we are also proposing amendments which complement Canada's commitment to the international community in its efforts to bring to justice persons suspected of war crimes or crimes against humanity.

To further the important work of the Solicitor General, the department is proposing amendments to the information disclosure provision of the Canada pension plan, the Old Age Security Act and the Unemployment Insurance Act by allowing the commissioner of the RCMP, the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada access to information controlled by our department.

Canada is strengthening its ability to be a meaningful partner in this effort. I assure hon. members that this access will be strictly controlled and will be restricted to actions conducted by Canada in Canada.

On the information exchanges with veterans affairs, other changes to the information provisions contained in the Canada pension plan and Old Age Security Act will follow for expanded information exchanges in veterans affairs. Even though many of our clients are the same our ability to communicate with each other has been very limited.