

### Supply

and studied the issues. I believe it came up with some very positive and innovative proposals.

● (1115)

First, I want to examine the current situation in this country. Presently there are some 2.5 million Canadians who are over the age of 65. Of those, 600,000 live below the poverty line. What is critical to note is that most of those 600,000 are single and four-fifths of them, or 80 per cent, are women. They are women who, for the most part, worked full time in the home when they were younger and had little or no opportunity to prepare financially for what we so euphemistically term their "golden years". Even if they receive the full Old Age Security and guaranteed income supplement, it is a total of \$534 a month or \$18 a day. That amount is \$2,000 below the poverty line for people living in medium-sized cities across this country, such as Kingston, Sudbury, Sydney, Kelowna and Sherbrooke. People who live in cities like those, where they receive only the Old Age Security and guaranteed income supplement payment, live \$2,000 below the poverty line.

The all-Party task force on pension reform recommended that the income for single persons over the age of 65 should be set at two-thirds of the income of married couples. For those most in need, that would mean a maximum increase of \$102 a month of the guaranteed income supplement. However, that increase would be based on a sliding scale downward, depending on other additional income that the pensioners might have. It meant that those most in need would receive the largest increase.

The Government chose not to accept that recommendation. Instead, the Minister of Finance in his February Budget proposed to raise the guaranteed income supplement by \$25 a month on July 1 and by a further \$25 a month in December. That is the proposal that the Government has brought forward and the proposal that I hope will go through Parliament. But I must ask Government Members today, where is the legislation to implement even that increase? It is less than two months before the first half of that \$50 increase is supposed to take effect, yet there is no sign of any such Bill on the Order Paper. Surely the Government, with all its bureaucrats and advisers, cannot be having that much difficulty drafting such a simple piece of legislation. Surely that is not difficult. Perhaps we should ask whether it is the will to find a way that is holding the Government back.

Three years ago, the Minister of National Health and Welfare made this statement in the House of Commons, as reported at pages 8609 and 8610 of *Hansard* on March 25, 1981:

—we have often repeated the commitment of this Government to bring all the senior citizens who now receive the supplement over the poverty line.

Of course, she did not say when. Therein lies the deception. When statements like that are made by a Minister of the Crown, expectations are raised. The elderly poor anticipate that their burdens will be lessened, but nothing happens except that the limited income that they receive gets stretched thinner and thinner as the costs of the bare essentials of life get higher

and higher. Surely if there is any sense of decency and awareness of priorities left in the Government benches at all, it will bring in the legislation that was promised in the February Budget to increase the guaranteed income supplement.

● (1120)

I do not understand what the holdup is. The Government since that time has seen fit to introduce any number of other measures. Why not this one? Why has the Government not felt that this one was as necessary as any other piece of legislation that could be considered by this House? If this Opposition Day motion does nothing else but provoke the Government into taking action in this regard, we will have achieved something really worth while.

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

**Miss MacDonald:** I would like to ask what are the prospects for those under the age of 65 who are still in the paid labour force or who are working full-time in the home? That subject was addressed by the all-Party task force on pension reform. The task force had two very real concerns in this regard, Mr. Speaker. One was coverage and the other was cost. It came up time and time again.

First with regard to coverage was how to reform the pension system so as to encourage and make it possible for those who are not now in retirement income plans to be able to participate in them. That was the one question we dealt with. The second was the cost of such reform, not only at the outset but the escalating cost to the public purse if these critical measures are not taken to bring all of these people who are not presently in retirement income plans into them. What would be the cost to the public purse down the road if this issue is not dealt with? We looked at the immediate costs and we looked at the long-term costs to the people of Canada. We did so, Mr. Speaker, because the problem is there before us. Old Age Security payments, public expenditure, this year amount to some \$12 billion. That is a lot of money, Sir, but that amount will increase rapidly with an aging society. However, if those presently below the age of 65 are encouraged to prepare now for their retirement years, the public expenditure could be reduced.

Let me elaborate on coverage. At present, there are some 2.7 million people who work full-time in the home who have no access to the Canada Pension Plan, let alone any other pension plan. That group was of great interest to us—almost three million people who work full-time in the home. There are as well some five million people in the paid labour force who have no supplemental benefits. They pay into the Canada Pension Plan and that is it. These five million people in the paid labour force are primarily in the \$10,000 to \$28,000 income bracket. They work for the most part in businesses and firms which do not have pension plans, and they see RRSPs as a vehicle for higher income earners, not for themselves. Both groups that I have mentioned, those who work full-time in the home and the five million in the paid labour force who have no supplemental benefits at the present time, account for a total eight million