

Old Age Security Act

(Mr. Siddon). In my area many senior citizens have a problem with income, but they also have a problem maintaining meaningful involvement in the community. I wonder if the previous speaker could provide me with some guidance in this matter.

Three senior Cabinet Ministers come from the Province of British Columbia—the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans (Mr. Fraser), the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Miss Carney) and, of course, the Minister of State for Science and Technology. It is unfortunate that many senior citizens' groups which have been working on major projects have not been able to meet with or get a response from the Ministers who represent British Columbia. Those Ministers are not only responsible for their own specific Ministries, they are also responsible for representing the people of British Columbia and its senior citizens in Cabinet. I wonder if the previous speaker could provide me with some guidance on how we might be able to persuade Conservatives, particularly the three Ministers I mentioned, to pay attention to the general needs of senior citizens, and what might be done to encourage the Government to respond to their requests for meetings. Could the Hon. Member comment on the integrity of such a Party and its concerns about the senior citizens of the country, in particular those who live in the riding of Comox-Powell River?

Mr. Orlikow: Mr. Speaker, I wish I could give my hon. colleague some advice, but I do not have any more information than he does as to why Conservative Cabinet Ministers will not meet with concerned citizens—seniors or any other group. I find it passing strange that the Cabinet Ministers in the Government who speak so much of consultation will not consult with the people in their respective provinces who have problems which they want to discuss.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): The period for questions and comments has expired. I will now recognize the Hon. Member for London East (Mr. Jepson) on debate.

Mr. Jim Jepson (London East): Mr. Speaker, as I rise in the House today to make my maiden speech, I feel both pride and humility at the responsibility which was entrusted to me in representing the citizens of London East. At the same time I would like to thank the voters for the support and confidence which they showed on September 4. At this time I would like to reaffirm my commitment to upholding their interests in Parliament. It is a goal which I pursue with confidence, a confidence that can only come from being a member of a decisive, strong and open Government.

I would also like to congratulate the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp) on the sensitivity and competence with which he is carrying out his responsibilities. I commend him for wasting no time in presenting this Bill which is of such importance to women and older citizens, two groups who have not always enjoyed credit and opportunity commensurate with their contributions to society.

It is very satisfying for me personally, in the first debate in which I am taking an active part, that the subject is one of such immediate concern to senior citizens. London cannot

adequately be described without reference to a vitality which reaches all sectors of the community. The City of London is the southwestern Ontario regional centre for the three pillars of our economy: services, retailing and manufacturing. It has many small businesses which, as we all know, form the heart of our economy. London's educational and cultural resources rival any city which is twice its size. Its ethnic and religious organizations give a rich and varied character to the city. One exceptional quality of the city which comes to mind today is its broad array of facilities which address the needs of senior citizens. We are privileged to have several senior citizens' residences in the riding, as well as Parkwood Veterans' Hospital, and many service clubs and organizations which work closely with the senior community. They give London an outstanding record and bring credit to the people of London.

In the interests of social justice and, even more important, on account of its significance to a great many citizens of London, Ontario, I welcome the opportunity to speak today on a subject which badly requires reform.

Bill C-26, an Act to amend the Old Age Security Act, cannot be faulted on either its logic or its substance; both are consistent and well thought out. This proposal will extend the spouse's allowance to widows and widowers between the ages of 60 and 64 who are trying to live on a very low income. It will make no difference when the applicant's spouse died. The legislation will assist approximately 85,000 widowed persons, which represents over 60 per cent of the people in that age bracket who have suffered the loss of their spouse.

Those 85,000 people, in all likelihood, are having an unfortunate amount of difficulty trying to make ends meet. To relieve this burden from so many older people, Bill C-26 allows the Government to keep a very specific promise which it made to senior citizens during the election campaign. More important, through passing this legislation, we can demonstrate to the Canadian people the seriousness of our commitment to a comprehensive system of financial assistance to help the disadvantaged. I feel strongly that Bill C-26 is a very effective piece of legislation. I am glad to see that all Parties of the House have recognized that.

Some opposition Members have expressed faint criticisms regarding the Bill, in terms of what it does not do. I would like to spend time addressing those concerns. Legislation which is drawn up carefully and responsibly has very precise limits. There are both logical and natural boundaries to the effects of the policy instruments which the Government chooses in any particular circumstance. That is certainly true in the case of Bill C-26.

Both the Hon. Member for Hamilton Mountain (Mr. Deans) and the Hon. Member for Hamilton East (Ms. Copps) have tried to seize moral high ground by pointing out that the Bill does not address the problems of older people because it does not tackle the issue of high unemployment due to technological and economic readjustment. I share their concern for what is one of the largest social issues which faces industrialized nations. It is my sincere hope that the Government can address, in a comprehensive way, the increasingly severe eco-