

*Old Age Security Act*

of senior citizens' institutions is cost-shared monthly with the federal Government on a 50/50 basis. In other words, a person between the ages of 60 and 65 will not benefit from this legislation. That \$500 cheque will go to the person and they will be given back an amount of money which is exactly equal to what they received before they qualified for the cheque. The federal Government, through one branch of the Department of National Health and Welfare, is paying \$500 on the deficit of operating the home for that particular senior citizen, whereas previously the total deficit was shared on a 50/50 basis. In other words, by issuing that cheque the federal Government is reducing the provincial Government's input on the debt of that institution.

I have brought this matter up today because I have noticed that this Government wants to have a very cosy relationship with the provincial Governments. The Government will not object to provincial regulations in which the net benefit to senior citizens has varied by as much as 300 per cent between the provinces since December 31. It is alarming. We cannot call it a social security safety net. Some provinces have 90-day rules respecting welfare. People can starve under that rule. People say that we cannot starve in Canada, but the fact is that we can if there is a 90-day rule respecting welfare. In other words, if a person made more money than they would have received from welfare and they lost their job, and the amount of income from that job amounted to more than they would have received from welfare for the previous 90 days, that person would not qualify for welfare for 90 days.

Something should be done. There should be a national standard. The Minister should amend the Bill to allow a person living in an institution to keep 50 per cent of what they would receive under this legislation. The Minister should also change the rules as they apply to other branches of his Department, such as the Canada Pension. For example, let's say that someone applied for disability under Canada Pension and over a period of two or three years he argued the point with Canada Pension. Then all of a sudden he is notified by Canada Pension that he will receive \$8,000 because his claim became effective two years ago. That person would then be horrified to discover that, because of a recent agreement with provincial Governments, 100 per cent of any kind of assistance he receives from the provincial department of social services for drugs and so on will be deducted from the disability payments under the Canada Pension Plan. In other words, the person ends up getting nothing for the period for which he qualified. The cheque is automatically sent to the provincial Government.

● (1220)

There is the straight injustice of the matter, Mr. Speaker, but what is more, the federal Government in effect is paying \$3 for every \$1 that the province puts out. In the first instance it is 50-50 cost-shared under the Canada Assistance Plan, and then there is a lump sum payment equal to the total amount of social assistance paid out. In other words, the provincial treasury actually makes money on the deal.

I am sure there are other points, Mr. Speaker, which other Hon. Members will want to make in the continuing debate on this Bill. There are many things which should be said. I call on the Government and the Minister of National Health and Welfare to give us the assurance that, when he says that 85,000 Canadians are going to benefit from this legislation, 85,000 Canadians will benefit, including those in senior citizen homes, nursing homes, homes for special care, or those in any subsidized housing which the Government cost-shares under the Canada Assistance Plan. That is not the case today. The Minister should be made aware of that fact and should change the legislation accordingly to guarantee the individual at least 50 per cent of the money which we are saying he will receive.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Raymond Garneau (Laval-des-Rapides):** Mr. Speaker, at first glance, Bill C-26 should give many Canadian citizens a reason to rejoice, and rightly so. When the Government announces that a number of Canadians, widows or widowers, between the ages of 60 and 64, will be eligible for the Guaranteed Income Supplement or its equivalent, this is of course a positive point, and we on this side of the House have said as much in the course of this debate.

We have also pointed out that this improvement to previous legislation is in fact the outcome of action taken several years ago by successive Liberal Administrations which have shown an ongoing concern for senior citizens, by introducing the Old Age Security Pension, the Guaranteed Income Supplement, the Spouse's Allowance and indexing of pensions and regular increments. Bill C-26 is of course one more step in this direction, and we welcome it.

However, we do not welcome the discriminatory aspect Bill C-26 contains. It is a little like deciding, for no particular reason, to give one child an allowance of \$5 a week and the other nothing, even if they happen to be twins. What is happening here? A woman of 63, for instance, who is in financial need and who is a widow will receive an allowance, and another woman who is single will not. That is the kind of discrimination we want to bring to the Government's attention and which we urgently want to see corrected.

A while ago, the Hon. Member for Charlevoix (Mr. Hamelin) in his speech explained that it was mainly for a financial reason and he quoted a figure of \$1.5 or \$1.4 billion. Mr. Speaker, it would not take a billion and a half to correct the injustice contained in Bill C-26. We are talking about 80,000 people and the estimated cost is around \$270 million, without mentioning the fact that, by extending the benefits of Bill C-26 to single, divorced or separated people, there would be a decrease in the amount spent on cost-shared programs, as mentioned by my colleague just a moment ago, because, whether those eligible are widowed, single or divorced, if they are eligible, it is because they need assistance.

These people already receive social assistance, and since the costs of social welfare programs are shared equally by the