

*Adjournment Debate*

vantaged group. I welcome the things that the Minister of National Health and Welfare has said about doing something for women in these groups; but I confess that much as I enjoy the position that the Minister of National Health and Welfare takes, and much as I am ready to quote the things that she says, it does annoy me that we are told again and again that this is a time of restraint, that there is no money, and all the rest of it. As I said in response to someone who used that line the other day, that has been the line of ministers of finance from the day when the minister of finance, back in the middle twenties, told J. S. Woodsworth that there was no money for a pension of \$20 a month.

My second point in my question on Friday, July 3, had to do with the fact that the Minister of Finance (Mr. MacEachen) keeps telling us how strong the economy is, and we get these reports about the billions of dollars which are around. How does the Minister of National Health and Welfare square with that her being told that, so far as increased pensions are concerned, she just has to wait? She said, "When I see the money, when I see the colour of the necessary billions of dollars, I will be at the door of the Minister of Finance." I want her at the door of the Minister of Finance right now.

Then my third point had to do with the fact that the same minister of National Health and Welfare has some very good ideas about tax reforms which ought to take place. We liked her proposal for a child tax credit as opposed to deductions from taxable income. She has other suggestions. She points out the many loopholes there are in the tax system which result in those who are not in need getting all sorts of benefits, cutting down the money which is available to provide pensions or assistance to those who need it. On that score, too, I want her to be knocking much more seriously on the door of the Minister of Finance than I feel she is.

As I say, those are the three specific points that I put into my question. I know that when parliamentary secretaries are assigned to answer questions in the late show, they like to have the member stay on the questions that he asked. Sometimes I see faces over there go ashen when the member gets up and talks about something else altogether. My hon. friend must be ready to answer. She is the only parliamentary secretary and the only Liberal over there tonight. She is the Liberal party. She will realize that I am dealing with the very points that I raised in my question.

As I say, the thrust of all that is that it is not good enough to talk about doing something for senior citizens four or five years down the road, just before the next election sometime in the eighties or nineties. I hope I can say it without giving offence to anyone: I felt this last Thursday night. I said it when I opposed the bill which was before the House that night. I expressed the hope that members generally having done so well for themselves, both in pay and pensions, would have some conscience about these things, and I want to see action very soon.

● (2205)

Therefore, I present to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence (Mrs. Appolloni) the points that I have raised. I hope she has the answers to them. I hope also she will assure me that she will get behind the Minister of National Health and Welfare and push her for action soon, not just before the next election. Our pensioners need substantial improvements now.

**Mrs. Ursula Appolloni (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Defence):** Mr. Speaker, it is very difficult to answer the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles). If my face is ashen it is because it is hard to dispute the hon. member. He is reasonable, and he makes very good claims, with which I personally agree. Nevertheless, I am sorry but I have to repeat what the minister has said over and over again because it is the truth. As the hon. member has rightly said, the minister is extremely sympathetic to this question but she does not have the money. The answer is that simple and that horrendous.

The government does have a clear responsibility to provide pensions for the elderly, and it discharges this responsibility through the Old Age Security program and through the Canada Pension Plan. However, as the hon. member knows well, direct assistance to other persons, that is to those who have not reached the pensionable age, in a provincial responsibility. The provinces already provide benefits for these groups through cash social assistance and through a variety of free services. The federal government also plays an important role in the provision of these benefits since it pays for 50 per cent of their cost. That is a fact not generally known by the public.

One does question the desirability of a universal program to assist people between the ages of 55 and 65. Such a suggestion implies that the majority of Canadians in this broad age group requires this type of assistance. I do not believe that is the case. Even if we were to make it universal, the trouble would be that people who do not need the money would benefit from it, whereas people who need it desperately would have to do with so much less.

Some might see this idea of lowering the age requirement as being tantamount to reducing the qualifying age to 55 for Old Age Security pensions. Here again we find another problem. Even setting aside the enormous cost it would imply, we must recognize that such a move might work as an incentive for individuals to leave the work force much earlier and thus disrupt our socioeconomic structure. Thus, the ultimate cost, social and economic, might be even higher than the more than \$3 billion of direct initial federal expenditures which would be required.

**Mr. Knowles:** It would provide jobs for younger people.

**Mrs. Appolloni:** The government has committed itself to the elimination of poverty among the Old Age Security pensioners who live alone. This is the government's first priority and it is a costly one.