

ment and Immigration) and Minister of State (Seniors), was escorted to a seat in the Senate chamber.

**Senator Murray:** Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to welcome to the Senate, for the first time I believe, my ministerial colleague, the Honourable Monique Vézina.

As you all know, Mrs. Vézina was first elected in the House of Commons in 1984. She was Minister for External Relations and then Minister of Supply and Services.

Today, she is Minister of State (Employment and Immigration) and Minister of State (Seniors).

She is here to answer your questions concerning Bill C-57. Mrs. Vézina, do you have an opening statement to make?

**Hon. Monique Vézina (Minister of State (Employment and Immigration) and Minister of State (Seniors)):** I could make one in a few seconds.

**Senator Murray:** Mrs. Vézina will make a brief statement before the Committee of the Whole.

She is accompanied by Mr. Pierre Fortier and Mrs. Carole Vallerand from the Department of National Health and Welfare.

[English]

Mr. Fortier is Director General, Income Security Policy and Legislation; Mme Vallerand, chief of Policy, Income Security Policy and Legislation.

[Translation]

**Ms. Vézina:** Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for the invitation. It is indeed my first visit here in this Chamber. As Minister, I am almost responsible for seniors and the new age!

I simply want to tell you that Bill C-57 is a piece of legislation that will help several thousands handicapped people. It is therefore a bill that has a very important social value and that will enable those people to enjoy privileges that are theirs.

I am pleased to see that the federal and provincial ministers, the Minister of Finance and the Minister responsible for Social Services have reached a consensus on the content of that bill.

I am accompanied by my officials who will be pleased to answer any technical questions. Thank you.

[English]

**The Chairman:** Honourable senators, shall the title be postponed?

**Hon. Senators:** Agreed.

**The Chairman:** Shall clause one carry?

**Hon. Senators:** Agreed.

**The Chairman:** Any questions for the minister?

**Senator Marsden:** I have questions for the minister. They do not apply necessarily to paragraph one, however.

The minister knows that we support this bill. We supported the earlier bill that was brought forward by Mr. Redway and we are glad to see this initiative being taken up. But if I understand the situation correctly, a person who is a late

applicant for entitlement to a disability pension will have a determination made as to whether or not that person could have applied and received disability benefit at a time when the person had coverage under the plan. Am I correct in that understanding?

[Translation]

**Ms. Vézina:** The process will be exactly the same with the same criteria people have to meet now under the Canada Pension Plan. The criteria are exactly the same as provided in the existing legislation.

• (1520)

[English]

**Senator Marsden:** Perhaps I did not understand correctly. The process may be exactly the same, but who will determine how late is too late?

[Translation]

**Ms. Vézina:** They will be exactly the same staff, the same officers who normally determine eligibility in other situations. The very same people will determine the eligibility of those applicants.

[English]

**Senator Marsden:** So I understand there is to be no new tribunal?

**Ms. Vézina:** No.

**Senator Marsden:** May I ask you another question? Fortunately, Canadians are now far more aware than we have been previously about the meaning of the term "disability". We are also aware that there are a great many people who have debilitating diseases or conditions and, while they may be able to work for many years, at some point they will no longer be able to work and therefore might require a disability pension. It is on the plight of those people that I focus my question.

If a person is hired and the employer knows that that person has a disability and the disability deteriorates to the point where the person can no longer work, will that person be entitled to a disability pension? They did not become disabled while on the job. That person was already disabled. How does that operate?

[Translation]

**Ms. Vézina:** I consider this question to be highly technical. I can find the information for you and forward it to you. Really, I could not give a precise answer to that question. If you want to repeat the question, I will ask my officials to find the answer.

[English]

**Senator Marsden:** By all means. My question relates to the situation in which someone is hired, the employer knowing that that person has a disability. The disability does not prevent that person from employment, but later, it does so. Let me give you an example. I am a great advocate of employment equity; I believe we should be hiring more people with disabilities. We now consciously recruit people who have disabilities. Their disabilities do not prevent them from being employed. How-