

Private Members' Business

public health care system, we feel that we must urgently attack the problem at its root, which is poverty.

We should also remember that the men and women who are now seniors, only yesterday, blazed the trail and built with their own hands, their efforts and their lives, the Quebec and the Canada we live in today. Thanks to them, our society offers us a certain quality of life and certain values, because all through their lives, they worked to implant and strengthen them.

Today, these builders are taking a well-deserved rest. They have passed the torch on to us, and it is important, even our duty, to ensure that they be treated with respect during this period of rest to which they are entitled. Bill C-282 faithfully provides this respect. I have explained to you why I approve of Bill C-282.

[English]

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay East, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, before I begin my comments on Bill C-282, I would like to preface my remarks by putting this in its proper context.

It was interesting when the member for St. Boniface was making comments in regular House business, he was saying that Reform members think they have haloes. No, we do not think we have haloes, not at all.

We do look at some of the actions of the government. We do look at some of the things it is doing, particularly when we look at the plight of seniors in our nation and how they will be potentially impacted positively, I might say, by Bill C-282. All of these things have to be put into context.

I draw to the attention of the House the *Ottawa Citizen* of yesterday which states: "Treasury Board president had met bitter caucus resistance to serious pension reforms", that is from the Liberals, "in December. He said he could only promise the government will fulfil vows made during the 1993 election campaign".

The issue in Bill C-282 is particularly near and dear to the people. They see the Liberals incapable of coming to a consensus on something very simple and straightforward. Return MPs' pensions to normal industry standards. What is complex about that? I do not find anything complex about it. I realize I should not imply or impugn values, so I would not use the word hypocrisy in that context.

I am also interested in some of the actions of the government. The *Calgary Sun* on the weekend noted that in the past year Ottawa has announced a \$50 million anti-smoking campaign while at the same time giving away \$400 million of taxes because it was unwilling to enforce the laws of the land as they stood. It established a new \$30 million anti-racism committee

and will spend \$1 million to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Canadian flag.

I have had the good fortune of being able to travel offshore as a tourist from time to time. I am very proud of the Canadian flag, wear it on my apparel, have it on my suitcase. It stands for the great nation that we are. But to be putting out \$1 million at this time for a 30th anniversary when we are talking about the enactment of Bill C-282 being a potential cost of \$3 million to the treasury, the numbers just do not add up.

• (1920)

While I do not see in any way the concept of Reform members feeling that they have haloes, on the other side of the coin I can see why Canadians might say to themselves: "I do not understand a party where there are such willy-nilly things all over the place that just do not seem to make any sense".

Before I begin my comments on this bill I would also like to say that I really applaud and salute the member for Burin—St. George's for his initiative on this. His intent is very laudable.

I rise today to speak to Bill C-282, an act to amend the Income Tax Act on medical expenses for disabled senior citizens. As has already been recited, the purpose of this bill is to lower the threshold for deductibles of seniors for the medical expenses tax credit. It lowers the threshold by altering the formula for determining the medical tax credit for disabled seniors by means of rewording item (c) of subsection 118.2(1) of the Income Tax Act.

Under the current law the first \$1,614 dollars, or 3 per cent of net income, is required to be spent before it can be taken into account for income tax purposes. The bill would make it possible for all eligible medical expenses from the very first dollar to, in effect, be income deductible for senior citizens.

The reason for targeting disabled seniors for redress is because their higher medical expenses and lower incomes leave them with a disproportionately high relative cost from the limited deductibility. It is estimated that the average deductible medical expense for disabled seniors is twice as high as that for all other tax filers.

The proposed amendment to the Income Tax Act could result in a potential revenue loss of approximately \$3 million. Certainly not a huge amount in light of the numbers we were just talking about; a \$400 million giveaway for taxes on cigarettes no longer collected. Actually I understand from other sources that it will be \$800 million and \$50 million for an anti-smoking campaign to counteract that. It seems to me we are getting close to a billion dollars when we add on the \$30 million plus the \$1 million I was talking about. Therefore, \$3 million certainly is not a huge amount.

On the face of it, the bill seems fair and equitable. By altering part of a formula for the purpose of allowing disabled seniors