

*Government Orders*

• (2010)

My New Democrat colleagues and I have proposed a number of amendments, contrary to what was just said in the House. I think we have proposed around 30 amendments to this legislation. One of those amendments would have provided for retroactivity so that women who were cheated out of their pensions by government policy would now be able to get that pension. That amendment was defeated by the government majority in the House of Commons.

Another New Democrat amendment moved in the committee studying this bill would have provided for spousal representation on pension advisory committees. That was also defeated by the Conservative majority.

Other amendments that were drafted in consultation with spouses concerning the imposition of a trust on the pension plan, the amount of the pension to be transferred, and so on, were also defeated by the Conservative majority.

I am, however, pleased that the government took some of the New Democrat amendments and proposed them itself, such as the valuation of pensions, the disclosure of pension information to the spouse and a determination of the length of the period of cohabitation.

As I said earlier, this is an issue I have been working on since only months after I was elected to this House of Commons. I have received letters from a number of women in every region of this country who have been very badly treated by the current legislation.

I have written to the Minister responsible for the Status of Women who is also the Associate Minister for National Defence a number of times over the years asking for relief for particular women, married women who had devoted their lives to a husband's career and children and then found themselves living in poverty. I also wrote to the President of the Treasury Board. I asked the ministers to urge their government to support our amendment on retroactivity. Sadly that was to no avail.

The government's record on women and pension is extremely poor and unfortunately so are these women who have been caught in this squeeze. They are also extremely poor. In the area of the Canada Pension Plan the government has failed the women of Canada.

I have been corresponding for years on the case of Helen Marie Davis. This woman was married for several decades to a man and underwent great personal hardship with him. She bore and raised eight children. She left him—she had to leave him later in life—and obtained a divorce. Because of his failing health she resumed living with him and he died within the year that they resumed living together.

Do members know how much she receives from her husband's Canada pension credit? Do they know how much she gets in a pension from the Canada Pension Plan? Zero, not one penny, because according to this government's policy she had been living with him less than a year even though she had actually lived with him for decades. She went through a humiliating and unexpected cross-examination at the appeal hearings and again she walked out with nothing, zero. This policy is cruel and nonsensical and must be changed.

As an example of the federal employment pension, which is the subject matter at hand, I have been working on the case of a woman who was married to a foreign service employee for 38 years. As a consular spouse she was not allowed by government regulation to take employment despite her own two university degrees. She was 63 years old by the time the regulations changed and too old to re-enter her own profession.

In some ways this woman is more fortunate than others I have dealt with in that her ex-husband has agreed to provide her voluntarily with half his pension. But because he is in a higher tax bracket than she, she must pay higher taxes than she would if the pension had been divided at source and provided directly to her.

A woman's right to her share of a pension should not have to rely on the good will of the divorced husband or on tricks provincial courts sometimes use to get around the federal legislation. I have heard so many problems with Revenue Canada's treatment of pension splitting that I urge this government to review the situation as quickly as possible and to take action.

Many divorced women live in poverty and many are saddled with huge legal bills. The government is not making sure that they get their half of the pensions regularly, nor is Revenue Canada sensitive to the situation these women find themselves in. Another woman wrote to me, and I will quote: