

Pensions Act

with the provinces. This is only enabling legislation and I cannot guarantee to the members of this committee or to the interested individuals in this country that payment will commence on December 1. This only indicates that the federal government is prepared to start making its share of the contribution as of that date. I assume that any province which finds itself financially incapable of doing so will not be paying this to their blind, disabled or aged persons who are in need of assistance. But we are prepared to meet the cost as of that date.

While I am mentioning the cost, Mr. Chairman, I would point out that the hon. member for Burnaby-Coquitlam dealt with this question and was able to figure out, as all of us are, that \$4.2 million in a quarter amounts to about \$13 million a year. It actually comes to \$7.9 million for old age assistance, \$3.9 million for disabled persons allowances and \$.8 million for blind persons allowances, for a total of \$12.6 million in a full year. The cost is admittedly not terrifically burdensome when one looks at the over-all cost of welfare. The benefits to the individual are very great. In the past many applications were turned down, mainly within the disabled persons category, and on this and some other occasions hon. members have mentioned the restrictions under the definition of "disabled". To the department and to each minister in succession this has quickly become a familiar problem, as have the representations on behalf of the blind, or by blind individuals and those who care for their welfare. These representations have pointed out the cost of blindness, which these people feel should merit a special allowance. But surely the members of the committee will see that to avoid discrimination, to avoid pigeon-holing people, the kind of program which I as minister mentioned as far back as July, and which has been mentioned by one or two hon. members today, notably the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, that is moving away from sort of making second class citizens of people because they have a specific disability, is a better type of program. It commends itself to me; it commends itself to those provinces which committed themselves, at least as far as the conference was concerned, and it may well be this will be the last time this house is called upon to make amendments to these three specific pieces of legislation.

I should like to make another observation here, Mr. Chairman. As I think all members know, the administration is handled by the provincial governments and not by the federal government. I receive a number of applications from individuals, particularly for disabled pensions, who do not seem to understand

that this is not handled from a central office in Ottawa. Perhaps one of the better features of its being handled by the provincial governments is that they are closer to the people and are able to keep a better check on the program. Unfortunately these tests are means tests, a test which has come to be held with certain disapproval by most people in the welfare field in this country; but the movement is from the means test to a more liberal test, and that is a needs test—not of what someone already has, but what it costs them to live in an individual area. My hon. friend from Simcoe made this point, that there are differing costs in differing parts of our country.

It is hoped, Mr. Chairman, that this is perhaps the last step with respect to these three programs, and perhaps in taking this last step it is the first step toward something which may fill a greater need, will make sure that the people of Canada receive better value for their welfare dollar, and will move away from categorizing individuals by virtue of a particular disability.

Mr. Monteith: Mr. Chairman, I will be very, very brief. I would simply like to say that it seems to me the hon. lady was overly sensitive in this respect, because the provinces already have these acts in force; they have legislation in force, they have agreements with the federal government and this is only a matter of increasing the amount. I still claim this should have been done at the same time as the old age security payment was increased. It would then have been optional for the provinces to decide whether they would take action, as it is now. The hon. lady indicated that apparently some provinces do not contemplate bringing this program in for some months. The same situation would have prevailed with regard to October 1, and those who wished to do so would have been in a position to do so.

Mr. Douglas: Mr. Chairman, there are a great many things one would like to say in this field of social welfare, because it is an extremely important topic and a question with regard to which we in Canada still have a long way to go if we are to keep pace with many of the other nations of the world which have far outstripped us in establishing adequate social security programs. However, I do not propose to go into the matter in detail at this time because, like all other members of the committee, I am extremely anxious that this legislation be passed quickly so that those in receipt of old age assistance, blind persons and disabled persons allowances will