

Adjournment Debate

discriminatory and unfair. It hurts average Canadians to an unbelievable extent.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre H. Vincent (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I am sorry to hear what my colleague from the other side is saying because it is completely wrong. When he says that taxes have gone up for 99 per cent of Canadians, he is wrong. When he says that only 1 per cent of Canadians are paying less tax, he is wrong again. And when he talks about tax increases, Madam Speaker, I would like him to tell me who established the minimum income tax in Canada so that all Canadians would pay their fair share of tax. Who put an end to tax shelters, including the one for scientific research, that cost Canadians \$4 billion tax shelters that his government put in that cost Canadians \$4 billion, with no benefits at all in terms of scientific research for Canadians and Canadian researchers. Madam Speaker, we put an end to that. We have removed everything called tax shelters; we have had a real tax reform. Madam Speaker, we have changed what were called exemptions into tax credits, so as to make the Canadian tax system fairer and more equitable.

The Hon. Member of the Opposition, Madam Speaker, does not mention those things. He does not mention that with a \$1,000 tax credit, whether a Canadian taxpayer earns \$10,000 or \$100,000, he has the same tax advantage, whereas under his government, with a \$3,000 exemption, the high-income earner making \$100,000 was at an advantage compared to the person earning \$10,000. He does not mention that. He does not say that the changes brought in in our tax reform are so good that the Liberal Government of Quebec adopted them in its budget two weeks ago. That is fair and equitable tax reform, and it was done in Canada for Canadians.

[*English*]

CANADA PENSION PLAN—ELIGIBILITY FOR DISABILITY
BENEFITS

Mr. Geoff Wilson (Swift Current—Maple Creek): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to take this opportunity to enlarge upon the subject matter of the question I put to the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp) on May 6, 1988. The question at that time related to the plight of a number of Canadians, perhaps not a large number but nonetheless an important grouping of Canadians, who have applied for a Canada Pension Plan disability pension but have been denied it as a result of applying late. In other words, their applications were received some time after their eligibility had run out.

● (1810)

A number of Members of the House will be aware of cases of deserving and needy Canadians who have been denied disability benefits under the Canada Pension Plan, denial having been based on a lack of application within the prescribed time. Eligibility, in fact, is subject to a test of recency.

The individual must have contributed in two of the last three years or five of the last ten years before the application.

Although one may have at one time met the contributory requirements, the failure to apply can mean that the entitlement in effect expires.

The failure to apply is fatal, even in those cases where the omission was due solely to the contributor being unaware of the need to apply or unaware of the availability of disability benefits under the plan. It seems to me that as a result of this innocent lack of knowledge an injustice results. All of this is regardless of the fact that the applicant has paid into the plan for many years on a mandatory basis while employed and that employment was terminated and wages lost for serious health reasons and because of an individual's disability.

I understand that as a result of such cases departmental policy has been changed to one of notifying potential recipients of their rights and opportunities. This new policy and direction are not of much help to cases such as that of a constituent of mine, Mrs. Donna Sinclair, who has given me permission to refer specifically to her situation.

Mrs. Sinclair is a resident of Swift Current, Saskatchewan, who is presently 59 years of age. She worked as a shoe store clerk and paid into the Canada Pension Plan from its inception in 1966 until 1978. Records indicate that she contributed for 11 of those 13 years. She was obliged to retire from her employment in 1978 as a result of diabetes.

Subsequently, Mrs. Sinclair has had to endure the amputation of both legs. She and her family have faced this situation in a very admirable way. She has displayed a lot of courage.

There is no question that a disability benefit at this time would be of considerable assistance to Mrs. Sinclair, and I might add that it seems to me it is a benefit to which she is fully entitled, having contributed to the Canada Pension Plan throughout her employment. I might also add that there is absolutely no question, from a medical point of view, that Mrs. Sinclair is disabled and has been at all material times. That fact is simply not in dispute. The problem lies at this time with the legislation.

As I stated earlier, an application for disability benefits is subject to a test of recency. This test is set out and contributions are required from the employee for a minimum qualifying period, which requirement Mrs. Sinclair met. The contributions must have been for at least two of the last three years or five of the last ten calendar years.

Had Mrs. Sinclair made the application when her employment terminated, she would of course have qualified. Unfortunately, through no fault of her own, she was simply unaware that a disability benefit might exist, let alone the fact that she could apply to receive one.

By the time she learned of the availability and the need for application it was 1987, and of course her application was denied on the basis that it was too late. It seems to me that the rights of the pension should vest in law at the point in time when the contributor is entitled to the benefit without regard to whether the application was made on time.