

Old Age Security Act Amendment

until the end of April. In the meantime many eligible pensioners will have received additional payments from provincial governments. It is conceivable that these people will be asked to return these additional moneys to the provincial governments upon receipt of the federal supplement. This way amount to only \$120, but if income tax returns are filed late it could amount to \$360. We should make sure that no one will be adversely affected as a result of the possibility of this situation occurring.

It is my suggestion that the minister will be derelict in his duty if he does not find out from the provincial authorities whether they intend to make any change in respect of additional assistance as a result of the increase in federal old age security payments. Can the minister give us some assurance in this regard?

An hon. Member: He cannot give that assurance.

Mr. MacEachen: Certainly I cannot.

Mr. Knowles: Perhaps we should pursue the question of provincial supplements a bit further. It would be appreciated if the minister was a little less hypothetical in respect of his hopes and got down to specific cases. Six months have now passed since we put the Canada Assistance Plan into effect. The minister has informed us that if provinces wish to pay supplements over and above the federal plan of \$105 per month the federal government will share in those supplements under the Canada Assistance Plan. Apart from the situation in Prince Edward Island, and we all know the genesis of that case, can the minister tell us whether any province has requested the federal government to share in a supplement to the old age security pension under the Canada Assistance Plan?

Mr. MacEachen: At the present time we are sharing in supplementary payments under the Unemployment Assistance Act.

Mr. Knowles: That is not what I asked.

Mr. MacEachen: We can share in this regard through the Canada Assistance Plan back to April, even though agreements have not been signed by the provinces. In respect of this particular plan I will have to obtain further information.

Mr. Knowles: In view of the fact the minister is not aware of any sharing, it appears that no province has moved into this field yet

by asking the federal government to share in the payment of supplements to old age security pensions under the Canada Assistance Plan. If that is the case, are we not just beating the air now? Is it not clear that chances are slim for those individuals now receiving provincial supplements to continue to draw those supplements as well as the federal government supplement of \$30 a month?

Earlier the minister spoke about the average as being \$22 per month compared with a possible \$30 a month. He said the average individual would be better off if he lost the provincial supplement and received the full federal supplement. That reminds me of the story told by Mr. Abbott when he was minister of finance about a man who was six feet tall but drowned in a lake with an average depth of only five feet.

Mr. Thomas (Middlesex West): Mr. Chairman, I ask my question for the purpose of clarification. Are we to understand from the various statements made by the minister this afternoon that when a provincial government pays a supplement to an old age security pensioner over and above the \$105 per month there is no limit so far as the federal government is concerned and that provincial governments through the municipalities, or however it may be done, may supplement these old age security payments over and above the \$105 a month? Is this true even though these supplementary payments may be increased in value by the inclusion of hospitalization and medicare provisions or the payment of premiums for these services by provincial governments? Is that what we are to understand?

● (9:10 p.m.)

Mr. MacEachen: Yes, this is the case. The only caveat I enter is with regard to the expression "without limit". The limit would be the requirements of the pensioner. But if, on the basis of needs or budget requirements, the province determined that \$140 was necessary in a particular case, we would share in the cost. We have put no ceiling on our sharing under the Canada Assistance Plan. That is why we thought it would go better than other programs which have income ceilings. This is the situation, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Fane: Mr. Chairman, I want to ask the minister a few questions and give him some advice, if I may, regarding provincial supplements. I come from Alberta where the provincial government in cases of need pays a supplement up to the amount that those on old age security receive. If their need is great