

incomes is not a pleasant thing to do. It would probably be much easier to present the same arguments as my colleagues opposite, but I can understand their position because they have no choice but to say that if they were in our place, they would do something else and choose another solution? It is an easy thing to say when they already know that they will never be in our place, when they were in the past, their major decisions were generally about the same as those of a Government which is trying to act responsibly!

Mr. Speaker, my third reason for taking part in this debate is that I find it absolutely shocking and surprising that some people try to imply that members of the Liberal Party are working against senior citizens. It is simply ridiculous to believe that a Government Member or a Member of Parliament, a responsible citizen, can work against a particular group in society, especially those who have given their life, their health and their energies to build our country. This is an unfair distortion of the difficult and unpleasant decision that we must make concerning this Bill. I certainly do not want to pose as the great defender of senior citizens, but like other people, I realize that if one group in our society deserves better protection and assistance, it is certainly those who have reached retirement age.

Mr. Speaker, I would say that is exactly what we have been doing for several years since this Government took office, and I would like to commend the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) who has shown leadership in that field. She has been working extremely hard to bring additional assistance to the elderly, with the full support of her colleagues in Government and, I am glad to point out, of our colleagues opposite.

Mr. Speaker, I think we all agree that it is unfortunate that we should be forced to limit the increase in the income of the elderly, but our situation is like that of a sick person who goes to see a physician and is told: "I will have to do some surgery. You will feel some pain, but you will be much better off in the end". Would anyone ever suggest that this physician is hurting his patient on purpose? Is it not rather because the physician knows full well he has to do that if he wants his patient to recover? Well, Mr. Speaker, that is the way I look at the situation. We are acting in the interest of the elderly, in the interest of others who cannot cope with runaway inflation, and in the interest of those who have limited incomes. So much so in fact that if inflation cannot be controlled, their predicament will go from bad to worse. That is why we have decided to set a limit on the increase.

I was listening to my colleague from Burnaby (Mr. Robinson)—who is a Committee Member and who attends our meetings now and then—when he said that there will be a decrease of \$300. I would be tempted to tell my friends opposite that their calculations are not always according to the book, and they have just given me a proof of that. Indeed, I have every reason to believe that the Minister of National

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Health and Welfare is quite right when she states that the January cheque will show \$251.12 and that the monthly amount will drop by 50 cents down to \$250.62 once this Bill becomes law. That means \$6 for a full year. I am not a chartered accountant, I have no degree in accounting, but I just cannot understand how anyone would say publicly that senior citizens will be hit as hard as the Hon. Member for Burnaby said they will be, when in fact the loss will be no more than \$6. True, the basic pension will not increase at the same rate, but that is a problem we will solve in due time. The important thing to remember is what we have done and why. Mr. Speaker, I conclude by saying that I will vote in favour of this Bill, but I hope that we will not have to take similar action in the future, that inflation will go down as we expect, and that senior citizens will be better off in the long run.

• (1740)

[English]

Mr. Benno Friesen (Surrey-White Rock-North Delta): Mr. Speaker, in the three minutes left to me in the debate at report stage on this Bill which will cap pensions of senior citizens, I would like to make just three short but very important points. I think that the Bill is wrong for the following reasons: first, it is based upon the premise that if one is powerful enough, one can do anything one wants. I remember how, with great fanfare during the last election campaign, the Government announced the extra moneys that it would give to those who required supplementary benefits. As soon as we came into this session, the Government did indeed pass that legislation. But now, almost at the first opportunity, when there is pressure for funds on the part of the Government, what does it do? It takes away. We return to the old adage that if a Government is big enough and powerful enough to give something, it is also big enough to take it away. First, it creates the dependency, and then it creates the withdrawal.

The second reason this is wrong is that it punishes those who follow the dictates of thrift and planning. Here we have a policy which is based on capping the increases on OAS, but not on the supplement. I understand the rationale of the Government in that those who are the poorest deserve to have as much protection as possible. However, one should take into consideration the figures given to the House and to the Minister by the Hon. Member for Victoria (Mr. McKinnon), to which I think the Minister was very carefully listening. I also think she was genuinely surprised by the disparity among people which will be created by this particular legislation.

Miss Bégin: No, I am not.

Mr. Friesen: Well, I hope you were surprised.

Miss Bégin: Absolutely not.

Mr. Friesen: This group of people who have saved all of their lives and have invested in private pension plans will now be punished because the OAS will be capped, but the supple-