

Is OAS going to be available to immigrants after three years?

Nick Bergamini

June 24th, 2013

Will immigrants be able to start collecting Old Age Security (OAS) payments after only three years in Canada – down from the current 10? A widely distributed piece of internet chain mail says so. But thankfully, the answer is no.

The letter, which pops into our inbox at the Canadian Taxpayers Federation at least once a month warns Canadians of the potential opening up of the OAS system to recent immigrants:

“Right now you have to have lived in Canada for 10 years in order to qualify for Old Age Security. She wants the time reduced to 3 years. Thousands could come to Canada when they are 62 years old never having worked or contributed to this country's tax system etc., and qualify for full Old Age Security benefits. 10 years minimum is reasonable - 3 is not!”

The letter refers to private member's bill C-428, which was introduced in 2009 by then Brampton-Springdale Liberal MP Ruby Dhalla. The purpose was to make immigrants eligible for OAS after only three years. This would mean that an immigrant who arrives to Canada in 62 could begin collecting at 65 until their death.

The bill garnered a significant backlash directed at Ms. Dhalla and prompted outrage from taxpayers across Canada and with good reason.

While the pension program isn't funded from premiums off paycheques like the Canada Pension Plan, it is funded from the government's general revenues, meaning that expanding it further would lead to rising taxes to cover the extra costs. It also diminishes the importance of contributions that long-time residents have made to the tax base and their communities.

Thankfully, the bill had little support, even from Ms. Dhalla's own caucus colleagues, and never even reached a vote in the House of Commons. When the 2011 election was called, the bill was removed completely from the parliamentary agenda. Ms. Dhalla lost the election and won't be able to sponsor any more private member's bills.

But two years later, internet chain mail that would have you believe that the passing of Ms. Dhalla's bill was imminent. In reality, it never had a chance of becoming law and the remaining Liberal MPs have made every effort to distance themselves from C-428. The only place this misguided piece of legislation still exists is collecting dust on a bookshelf in a dark corner of the Library of Parliament, where it belongs.