The growth is very rapid. The latest figures I have seen show that by the year 2036 we expect to have somewhere in the vicinity of 25 per cent of Canadians as senior citizens. This I believe gives even more impetus to the suggestion the hon. member has made.

To recap, I will use some of the figures that may be slightly different from his, however the point is still the same. The purpose of the bill essentially is to make it more fair for disabled seniors, quite a few in Canada. Specifically, it removes the requirement for seniors to have to pay, to have to reach a threshold or to have spent a total of $1,614 or 3 per cent of their income, whichever is the lesser—it is usually the lesser based on the 3 per cent—before they can deduct the 17 per cent of their medical expenses; in other words, to get some return for an expense on necessity.

Why would we make this proposal? Yes, it is out of compassion and it is out of dignity. However, there are some figures that support the reason we should be proposing and supporting this. First, disabled seniors make less and pay more for medical expenses. The figures quoted by my hon. colleague are accurate. The average income tax return in 1991, the year for which the figures are solid, was $25,639. That was the average income for those people who filed taxes. The average income for a disabled senior was $23,069. That is 10 per cent less than the average income filed.

The average expense for medical deduction was $1,580, whereas the average expense for a disabled senior was almost twice that amount, $2,716. There is one reason we should seek compassion and consideration for disabled seniors.

The second reason is that not only is their income lower, the income is based on the average, but the median income, the income that is the most recurring, not necessarily the average, the one that is basically what most of the disabled seniors earn or make, is closer to a low income level.

I agree with the figures suggested by my hon. colleague. The last time I checked the figures of the 21,000 disabled seniors in the province of Newfoundland whom I represent, 18 per cent are from low income families.

We have a group of people who deserve compassion, dignity and to be given some more hope than the average person who is not disabled or senior who can perhaps more afford to absorb the expense.

I am very conscious that I am part of a government in which the hon. Minister of Finance is trying to scrape the barrel to find every cent he can. I think every member in this House is conscious of that no matter where we stand on the issue of the budget and how it is executed.

The fact of the matter remains that for the number of disabled seniors this would help, we are looking at a sum of less than $3 million. Three million dollars is a lot of money to you, Mr. Speaker, and it is a lot of money to me. What is it in the overall expenditure of things considering the target and the group of people we are looking at?

Consider that we give in the vicinity of $5 billion to business and it says it does not really need it and does not use it well.

• (1905)

There are a lot of loopholes that have been discussed in this House tonight, yesterday and before the Christmas recess. It is the subject of many recurring media reports.

Against that backdrop $2.7 million is not a great deal of money.

I have talked about the seniors we have. I also have to remind members that of the seniors in our country, 46 per cent have some kind of a disability. Of that percentage of 46, 84 per cent live in households. In other words, they do not live in institutions where medical care, wheelchairs, hearing aids and visual aids are available to them.

Specifically, of those who live in households, 20,000–plus or 8 per cent need mobility assistance and cannot get it. Thirty–one per cent need hearing assistance and cannot get it. Ten per cent need visual assistance and cannot get it. Why?—it is not because it is not available, it is because they cannot afford it.

I would suggest if this private member's bill were passed it would certainly ease the burden on that group of Canadians which is least able to afford the expense to basically enjoy the necessities of life.

There is another statistic that I did not recall from my hon. colleague. I was also told that of the expenses that seniors who are disabled spend out of pocket, 20 per cent is for prescription and non–prescription drugs. That is one–fifth of their out of pocket expenditure. That also gives some indication of the magnitude and the importance of this particular bill.

I am like most other members in this House. I have 72 seniors groups in my riding. I have visited practically all of them. I have never visited one from which I have not come away inspired; inspired by the leadership they provide their community in helping themselves, in providing activities and staying very much alive.

I also find they are a great inspiration to the younger members of the community, showing them how to live by providing examples of life as it can be lived and, perhaps more than anything, showing all the communities I represent and which other members of this House represent the whole idea of picking themselves up by their boot straps and moving together in co–operation so that the synergism of the groups and the individuals in the groups amounts to more than the sum of the separate individual members. In my riding the largest group has