

As Canadians generally have suffered from inflation, I think the impact of that phenomenon on our society—for which the government must take considerable blame—rests heavily on the shoulders, on the pocketbooks and on the peace of mind of our senior citizens. So when the hon. member for Davenport (Mr. Caccia), a few moments ago in this debate, asked where the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton stood, let me say to him, through you, sir, that the member for Grenville-Carleton supports this bill. Like the members of his party, he believes that the job of the government is to help the disadvantaged to the extent that society can reasonably help the disadvantaged, just as it is the job of government in a society like ours to create an atmosphere where those who are not so disadvantaged can use their initiative and their entrepreneurial skills and take the risks to help build this country.

The question was asked of me where we stand. I put it to the hon. member that that is where we stand and, in terms of the senior citizens in this country, our party does not take second place to any other party in terms of its support of their betterment and their welfare.

But there is one thing that the hon. member for Davenport said which rather disturbed me. He said that it was his party which brought in the hospitalization scheme for Canadians, that his party proposed a hospitalization scheme in 1957, just before they were defeated. Let me point out that there was a little catch to it, and that is that the scheme had to be approved by the provinces having the majority of the population in the country.

The right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker) called it for what it was, a fraud and a swindle, and pledged that if the Conservative government was put in office in 1957 those conditions would be removed, which they were. So the hospitalization scheme that we have today in this country has as its basis that which was proposed by the right hon. member for Prince Albert when he beat the Liberal government in 1957.

I think one problem that arose—I do not want to fall into that trap—is that this debate has not followed the example given by the Minister of National Health and Welfare. A little trading game has been played, a little political game on the backs of the senior citizens. But I will say to the hon. member for Davenport that he is wrong in what he said. I felt I had to rise to correct his statement.

Quite frankly, I wish we would follow the request made by the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) and extend the spouse's allowance all the way, as had been advocated before. I assume from what the minister said that if the country could afford it, it could be done. What she said to me is that she has consulted with her colleagues but because of the restraint program which is in effect, it cannot be done.

I do not think there is any person in the House of Commons who would not want to see this program extended if it could be, and I assume that that kind of investigation was made and the extension of that program was turned down. I would be terribly shocked if it were turned down in order to be advanced perhaps next spring, just in advance of a general election. I

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think that would be the height of hypocrisy and I live in the hope that we will not play that kind of action game with senior citizens or any other group in Canada. I think we have to be honest about that.

I rise for a second reason and that is with respect to a remark made by the hon. member for Gloucester (Mr. Breau) about the equalization payments and the attitude of the hon. member for Halifax (Mr. Stanfield). As I heard the hon. member for Gloucester, he was saying that the hon. member for Halifax, the former leader of this party and former premier of Nova Scotia, took a stand the other day against equalization payments when he asked a question in the House. I heard that question from my sick bed at home and I heard the answer, and I must say that if that was the conclusion reached by the hon. member for Gloucester, then he needs his hearing fixed. I would commend to the Minister of National Health and Welfare that she invite the hon. member for Gloucester to go down to her department and have his ears examined, if not his head, with respect to that position.

I feel I have to say this because I come from central Canada. It is very easy for members from eastern Canada, from New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland, to support the concept of equalization payments, but it is sometimes hard in Ontario to support that concept. However, I support it and I am somewhat concerned when I hear that kind of misconstruction placed on the question put by the hon. member for Halifax by the hon. member for Gloucester.

I have no problem supporting the equalization principle, nor does the federal Conservative party, nor does the Conservative party in the province of Ontario. This has always been the case. That is the reason we are here as a nation. The concept of equalization is so important to us in Canada that our party has taken the view, against the advice of some constitutional tinkerers, that we should have that principle enshrined in the constitution of our country. I say that knowing that there are some on the other side of the House who would like to say that as the mother and father of every social program in Canada they are also the mother and father of the equalization system in this country. Well, they are not. It is axiomatic that it is necessary in terms of our confederation, and it is supported generally.

● (1632)

The hon. member for St. John's East referred to the Kingston document which was the result of a meeting of all the then premiers of Canada who happened to be Progressive Conservatives. That number has been augmented to such a degree by the bringing in of Mr. Buchanan of Nova Scotia and Mr. Lyon of Manitoba—we almost had Angus MacLean by one seat in Prince Edward Island—and Mr. Hatfield has been returned, that the next meeting of premiers will almost be a meeting of Conservatives; we wait only one event, and that is the installation of the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) as the Prime Minister of Canada. That is coming. Our system needs flush-