

*Improvement Program for Aged*

endeavour as a resource should be studied and co-ordinated for the benefit of all. I urge that a decision be made to establish an opportunities for the aged program at an early date, and that a conference be held in Ottawa of federal, provincial and regional people in that field, plus a representation of the old age pensioner organizations. There is a need for improvement in the health, economic, occupational, recreational, social and cultural opportunities of the senior citizens in Canada. Such a conference would emphasize and coordinate the efforts of the many and growing government departments and agencies already at work in this area. This would be of great interest to senior citizens and those people who will soon be in that category.

Some of the more immediate and obvious benefits which might accrue through this type of conference of organizations across the country would be to the old age pensioners or senior citizens. One such very obvious benefit would surely be a stimulation of the financing of low-cost travel by senior citizens. There are thousands of empty seats in aircraft flying across the Atlantic every week, and there are thousands of senior citizens in Canada who come from old countries in Europe and elsewhere who would like to make one trip to their earlier land. This could be very easily organized by such a procedure, thus providing opportunities for an aged project.

Other countries are ahead of us in this endeavour. In the United Kingdom, for example, I am told that for many years now there has been a program in operation under which retired people with special experience or skills are taken on contract by the British government for a year or perhaps two years and sent out to developing countries. In these places, the skills and experience of the British senior citizens have been of particular value to those countries to which they have been sent, and this has been of great benefit to the citizens themselves.

I have a report which indicates that in the state of New York alone there are now 38 such programs in operation in 19 counties involving 750 senior citizen volunteers. This program is called the "Serve Program" and is supported by the Health, Education and Welfare Department of the United States government. Let me quote from this report as follows:

Unique to the SERVE programs is the group approach. Volunteers are recruited in groups to serve, in individual assignments, on the same day each week at a given agency. In most programs, this makes it possible to provide group transportation from one or two central pick-up points to the agency and back. Regular group discussion meetings provide continuous in-service training. This group association gives the older volunteers an opportunity for social contact and to form new friendships.

SERVE volunteers in different communities perform varied assignments in general hospitals, hospitals for the mentally ill, schools for the retarded, homes for the aged, children's institutions, schools, libraries, museums, and other social, health, and welfare agencies.

There are many other endeavours they undertake which I will not take up the time of the House to enumerate. With the earlier retirement age coming, and already here in some instances, with some increase in social security over what was so 40 or 50 years ago, and with automation displacing older workers as well as keeping the young off the labour market, we have a general situation in Canada which would benefit by a federally initiated program of

[Mr. Mather.]

opportunities for the aged. This could operate in conjunction with the provinces and old age pension organizations to the benefit of both the individuals and the areas involved.

I mentioned that I was encouraged last year by some response from the government side of the House. I mention this particularly for the encouragement of my colleagues in the government benches, and so they will not talk this matter out this afternoon. I received a letter from the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) in which he said:

The basic proposition appears to have fair support and I am interested to find out more about what could be achieved in this respect.

I have been told by the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Munro) that this is a good idea. My prize support from the government side came from the former Minister of Justice, now the Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner). He is in a very good position to help promote this program I am urging.

• (1710)

He says:

I, too, have received a great number of letters from across the country expressing interest in the proposal that you mentioned. I still think it was a great idea and will do my best to persuade my colleagues when we are discussing this sort of thing.

With that sort of support I can hope, if I cannot get a green light for the motion, that I can at least get an amber one so that the subject might be allowed to idle to the appropriate committee.

**Mr. B. Keith Penner (Thunder Bay):** Mr. Speaker, I begin by commending the hon. member for Surrey-White Rock (Mr. Mather) for presenting this excellent notice of motion for our consideration. The hon. member has a most enviable record for proposing important, interesting and worthwhile new ideas and programs for the consideration of parliament and the government of Canada. He certainly is to be commended for this particularly valuable notice of motion now before us.

In recommending an Opportunities for Age program I note that the hon. member subscribes to the basic concepts which are embodied in the Opportunities for Youth program, and that he is enthusiastic and excited about the general over-all success of that program. Now he wishes to see it extended so that we may provide more opportunities for other persons in our society. I agree with him.

I think that the concept of encouraging innovative ideas and projects which involve people in performing socially beneficial tasks ought to be expanded into a year-round all-inclusive opportunities for people program. But maybe before going that far, what we should do, as the hon. member suggests, is to test a little farther the validity of the concept and make it available to another age group which is also potentially very rich with ideas for projects that deserve to be encouraged and supported with public funds. Here I am talking about that age group which is usually referred to as our senior citizens.

Some observers of the passing scene have suggested that what exists in our society now is a cult of youth. Hooked on an apparent youth binge, we tend to ignore the special needs of our aged. Our preference for youth