

Nurses' Retirement Age

Mr. Baldwin: I only said five or ten minutes in reference to my own particular portion, an invaluable contribution, but the hon. member for Red Deer (Mr. Towers), who will have the opportunity to discuss matters of some importance in the private members' hour, had agreed, if the committee sees fit, to allow the committee to encroach into his time as long as it is necessary to complete this bill. Of course we are prepared to give unanimous consent to continue with this debate until it is completed and encroach into the private members' hour as long as it is necessary. If there is any objection to that, then of course it is up to other members to express that objection.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, this is a good week to stick to the rules.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There does not seem to be unanimous consent, therefore we will go on to the private members' hour.

The House will now proceed to the consideration of private members business as listed on today's order paper, namely, notices of motions, public bills.

Mr. Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, I think you will find there is agreement to discuss private member's notice of motion No. 10 standing in the name of the hon. member for Red Deer (Mr. Towers).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is it agreed that we stand all motions before motion No. 10 and that at the request of the government the preceding motion, there being just one, keep its position on the order paper, and that we proceed with motion No. 10 in the name of the hon. member for Red Deer?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

[English]

CANADA PENSION PLAN

SUGGESTED RETIREMENT OPTION FOR FEMALE REGISTERED NURSES

Mr. Gordon Towers (Red Deer) moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should take immediate steps to provide that female registered nurses have an option to retire at age sixty and draw appropriate Canada Pension Plan benefits together with old age security benefits.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise at this time and address myself to this resolution which is of utmost importance to a large body of people who are working for the benefits of our society, namely, registered nurses. This motion, which would permit female registered nurses to retire and be eligible for all related benefits at age 60, was conceived when I spent many hours daily visiting a hospital recently during the prolonged serious illness of a member of my family. That was my first experience of observing, on a continuous basis, the varied and onerous aspects of the nursing profession.

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

A registered nurse, because of the type of vital responsibilities with which she is entrusted, must be vigilant, punctual, meticulous, untiring, obedient, dedicated, and have a calm and pleasant countenance every minute of every hour that she is on duty. The lives of patients, no matter how skilled is a surgeon or a doctor, depend on the nurses in the operating theatre, in the intensive care unit and elsewhere for the entire tenure of patients hospitalization. The mental strain of this pressure is multiplied when one remembers that strict adherence to details means life or death.

Added to this emotional strain is the heavy physical work involved and the daily hours which a nurse must spend on her feet. Because nurses must be on duty at all times, shift work is a necessity, meaning that a nurse must travel to and from work at varied hours, regardless of weather conditions, and be there on time to relieve her colleague on the previous shift. A registered nurse is also given the responsibility to teach nursing students, to supervise them in their training, and to oversee them in the performance of their duties when they graduate and join the registered hospital staff.

Because a nurse gives of herself unstintingly to others, performs unusually strenuous mental and physical tasks, often without any guidance, in my opinion she should be allowed to retire if she chooses when she attains the age of 60. I do not know of any profession which calls for such a variety of stressful responsibilities. Therefore such a policy could not be termed discriminatory. Society must understand that after years of strenuous efforts by nurses in caring for others in many cases their own health commences to deteriorate. That period of life from age 60 to 65 can become for them a real ordeal. Because they do not have any other means of support, why should we, as a society, make a demand on them that causes a hardship for them to fulfill?

I trust that hon. members will seriously consider the merits of this resolution and not talk it out, and I commend this motion to them for their support.

Miss Aideen Nicholson (Trinity): Mr. Speaker, an amendment to the Canada Pension Plan was recently before the House in the form of Bill C-22. One of the prime objectives of this bill is to provide full equality of treatment to all contributors to the Canada Pension Plan by removing all provisions of sex discrimination that existed within the plan. Today the hon. member for Red Deer proposes a special provision applicable only to female registered nurses, not to male registered nurses, not to registered nursing assistants of either sex. I see the provisions of Bill C-22 as an important affirmation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women in the labour force, a principle which all parties in the House have endorsed in one way or another. The motion before us seems to go against that principle.

Perhaps a broader issue even than that of equality for men and women is the proposal implicit in the hon. member's motion to make a special provision to extend Canada Pension Plan benefits for one occupational group of the labour force. This raises fundamental questions about the basic objectives of the plan, especially those that relate to benefit coverage, in this case the retirement age, and also about the relationship of the Canada Pension Plan to