

Disabled Persons Act

satisfactory to their families. I think, therefore, some consideration should be given to extending and broadening the definitions and the qualifications under which the federal government participates in this program for these people.

I know that that kind of motion has been introduced into this house a number of times. I am ready to admit also that there have been some concessions or some relaxing, if you like, of the regulations over the years. I do not believe that this procedure has reached the point whereby we can make payments that would be in the best interests of both the people involved and the Canadian taxpayer. I say that because there are many services that could be provided for disabled persons in their own homes which, because of a lack of income, they are prevented from having.

I should like to extend our support to the hon. member for Simcoe North (Mr. Smith) on this motion. I hope, too, that some of the opinions expressed by the hon. member for Halton (Mr. Harley) are going to be accepted by the government so that we can have some broadening of these definitions.

Mr. W. B. Nesbitt (Oxford): I shall only take a few moments because I notice there are other members who would like to speak on this subject. I should like to congratulate the hon. member for Simcoe North (Mr. Smith) for having brought this matter up on several occasions. I certainly agree with the remarks made by him, by the hon. member for Halton (Mr. Harley) with certain qualifications, by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) and the hon. member who just resumed his seat. I am very glad to see the minister is listening to this debate, and I am sure she would do well for herself if she dealt with this matter as quickly as possible by recommending to her cabinet colleagues some of the suggested changes. In addition, she would be doing a great service to a large number of people in this country who are disabled to a total and permanent degree.

Of course, it is this question of what is total and what is permanent that causes all the problems in the administration of these regulations. Without being unkind to the medical profession, I would say that very often it depends upon which doctor you go to whether it is decided you are permanently and totally disabled. I mean no disrespect to the medical profession but doctors, like the members of other professions, have differences

[Mr. Olson.]

of opinion. Some doctors seem to be more flexible in their views than others, and the regulations are very rigid. Indeed, unless the medical facts can be made more flexible it is going to be very difficult for any but a very limited number to gain any benefit from this legislation.

I should like to give the house an example that recently came to my attention indicating the need for a change in these regulations. A lady in my constituency was judged totally and permanently disabled by the Ontario workmen's compensation board. As no doubt hon. members from Ontario know, this board has very rigid rules as to what is total and permanent disability. Certainly, they are never too generous in their interpretation of these regulations. In any event, the applicant in question was judged totally and permanently disabled by the workmen's compensation board but for technical reasons, namely that part of the disability was caused not by the industrial accident but by other causes, the patient was only able to get a small pension. Then, application was made for the disabled persons allowance. However, she was told: "The workmen's compensation board may say you are totally and permanently disabled, but we do not have to say so." She did not get anything.

This is the kind of thing that needs checking up. I hope the minister is putting this item high on her agenda for changes in the regulations. I was particularly interested, of course, in this question of raising the ceilings on permissible income for those receiving these benefits. If anyone needs a little extra income it is these people who are disabled. They need it for drugs and the services of people to come in and help look after them and their living quarters. Certainly, these ceilings should be raised.

There is one suggestion I should like to make to the minister and it may be one that could be introduced without causing too drastic a change in the resolution. I suggest the adoption of the same principle that is used, at least in theory, by the Canadian pension commission. If there is some question of whether or not a person is going to be permanently and totally disabled in the future, the pension commission gives the benefit of the doubt to that person. I believe the application of such a principle might be of great help to these people. In all fairness, no one wants to be paying a pension to every applicant who comes along and who is not entitled to a pension. If this benefit of the