

Whereas in general blind persons do not have similar opportunities to compete with the sighted in sustaining their own livelihood, and

Whereas the handicap resulting from blindness generally results in lower incomes and restricted opportunities for employment, and

Whereas there are additional living costs directly resulting from blindness—

Then my motion is as follows:

In the opinion of this House, the government should consider the advisability of establishing a universal cost of blindness allowance for the legally blind of not less than \$200 per month and to be indexed to the consumer price index annually.

It so happens, Mr. Speaker, that last August there was presented to the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde) the report of a study entitled "Vision Canada". This was a study jointly undertaken by the National Council of the CNIB and the Department of National Health and Welfare, and I want to quote from it because I believe that the subject of blindness is not one that ought to be debated in this chamber in an emotional way. The arguments and positions put forth on behalf of the legally blind in Canada themselves have merit on which to stand. This study was conducted by a Professor Cyril Greenland and, as I have mentioned, was presented to the minister some seven months ago. At page 3 the following appears:

The extent of unmet needs, revealed by this study, presents a great challenge to all Canadians. It is obvious that no single agency, however well intentioned and resourceful, will be able to overcome the years of neglect, prejudice and intolerance which is the common experience of handicapped people in our society. The commitment to remedy these injustices must be manifested by the federal and provincial governments in the form of rational social policies and a greater investment of public funds in the human services.

Long before I was even of voting age, Mr. Speaker, colleagues of mine on this side of the House were asking the government to bring in legislation to provide for an allowance for the blind. For example, my colleague for Cumberland-Colchester North (Mr. Coates), and my colleague for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall), have on many occasions in this chamber asked the government to bring forward legislation to establish a minimum income for those legally blind. As everyone knows, blindness is a handicap. In 1975 there were just a few less than 30,000 legally blind people in Canada. This number will increase by the year 2000 to some 50,000.

The report "Vision Canada" was national in scope. It was preceded by months of research and study and countless hours of conversation with legally blind people in order that the recommendations that Professor Greenland put in his report were able to reflect the basic needs and desires of the legally blind. If I may use a biblical expression, the stones cry out for justice. The stones in this case, the legally blind, are crying out for a basic income. Let me refer to page 117 of this report, which has to do with a basic income for the blind:

The prime need of all blind Canadians is a basic or guaranteed income of a sufficient amount to provide life's necessities at a level which will permit the recipient to live in dignity.

I want to point out here that in the province of Manitoba there are no allowances for the legally blind. If they cannot earn their own way by employment, then they have no recourse but to go on welfare. Why is this, Mr. Speaker? Is it because they do not want to work or they have no skills? No, it

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is because they have a handicap that prevents them from competing in the marketplace. All these blind people are asking for, and what I am asking for on their behalf, is that the government take action now to establish a basic income to compensate the legally blind for their handicap. The quotation on page 117 continues:

For the older and more senior blind citizens, a reasonable basic income would provide that sense of security so requisite to contentment and peace of mind. For the younger and youthful blind citizens the reasonable basic income would provide the financial security which would permit them to move from occupation to occupation in search of one which was satisfying both mentally and financially.

It would be an understatement if I were to say that blindness costs money. There is a cost to blindness. I could say much about the cost of blindness, but I shall point to only two specific areas of cost to blind persons which are not common to the sighted. Again I want to quote from this impartial study conducted by Professor Cyril Greenland at page 113, under the heading "Transportation":

In our opinion and because transportation is the major, or at least one of the greatest problems of blind people, we feel that government financial assistance should be provided to help combat this frustration. In this day and age when traffic is a major concern even for sighted people, blind people are penalized in that they cannot safely travel alone.

For blind people to have the kind of mobility that you and I, Mr. Speaker, take for granted every day costs them additional money. The basic blindness allowance for which I am asking would compensate them for that. It would be a basic income from which blind people could pay these additional costs.

A second additional cost for blind people which is not common to sighted people is in the area of shopping. My ancestors were not Scottish, but I can spot a deal a mile away, Mr. Speaker. When I am shopping in shopping centres I watch for those bright red or yellow signs indicating that certain articles are on sale. It is obvious that those who cannot see also cannot see the bargains. According to page 13 of the report, it costs the legally blind from 10 to 15 per cent more per year to live because they cannot take advantage of the kind of shopping deals that we sighted Canadians can take advantage of.

I see my time is slipping by quickly, Mr. Speaker, and I think others of my colleagues want to speak, but let me simply repeat that blindness is a handicap and that a basic pension would simply compensate them for that pension. If I may go back to page 13 of the report "Vision Canada", a comprehensive and excellent report that I commend to every member of this chamber who ought to take the time to read it, the following statement is made:

Provincial income security programs, cost-shared with the federal government, were designed to reduce the worst effects of poverty. However, since no special allowance is made for the extra cost of blindness, blind recipients are in fact denied "a compassionate and equitable guaranteed income".

● (1710)

I took the time to calculate the cost to the Canadian taxpayer through this government or the treasury of the country of this allowance for the blind of a minimum \$200 a month. If you multiply \$200 a month by 12 months of the