

Supply

Mr. Hees: You mean playing games with the life of the government, don't you, Barney?

Mr. Danson: The effect of these motions, as I say, would be to kill these worthwhile programs which are primarily directed toward our senior citizens, people who have my highest priority and I think the highest priority of all members of the House. We do not play games or play politics with our elderly citizens.

Mr. Hees: You only play games with the NDP.

Mr. Danson: Neither do we engage in auction sales with the old age pensioners.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): Are you trying to be a prophet, Barney?

Mr. Danson: The hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert) may think we are not being serious about this. He was a member in the last House and he knows that my priority, the priority of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, indeed I think the priority of all members of the House, was the senior citizens. We have to think about them in a very selfish way. It does give more dynamism to our lifestyle if we live in a society where, as senior citizens, we know that we are looked after in security and with dignity; we can then live a more free-style life and take our chance when we are young and are somewhat more flexible.

Mr. Hees: Aren't you flexible now?

Mr. Danson: Yes, I am, and I am sure I will be for a long time. I am sure the hon. member is not suggesting that I am not flexible. But the point is we are still able to control our options. No one has ever suggested that life is easy, but when we are older we do not have the same chance as when we are young. That is why the old people must be looked after now. Therefore, I do not think we should play games by delaying legislation and embarrassing the government on a matter as important as this, and this applies particularly to the New Horizons program.

I do not say that because it is the most important program or the most significant thing that has ever happened in the history of this country, but because it is a very precious program. The greatest priority of all is the fundamental economic security of our senior citizens. But there is a lot more to it than that. There is a life style, a richness of life, which allows these people to do things they were not able to do before. I happen to think that it is a great program.

I was delighted to hear the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Cafik) say that some 17,000 people are now involved in the program. I was glancing at the minister's press release of December 18 last, which outlines some of the programs that are to be implemented right across the country. They are not massive programs. For example, there is a grant of \$5,100 for a program in St. John's, Newfoundland; a grant of \$3,900 for one in Whitbourne; another for \$1,170 for Kensington, P.E.I.; another for \$1,765 for Miscouche in P.E.I. There are programs right across the country. For example, in my own riding there are one or two small

[Mr. Danson.]

programs, but there are programs from coast to coast for small groups of people.

We also have to look at these programs in human terms. During the last election campaign—or, rather, during the last election; I do not recall there being a campaign—I was called down to Willowdale United Church in my constituency to meet a group of senior citizens there. They were not all members of the church because the group was non-denominational and used the church facilities to play card games such as euchre to reminisce. They had some interesting stories to pass on and they told me they would like to put them in a book. They wondered if somehow, through some government program, they could secure the services of a stenographer or secretary who would type these stories so they could be mimeographed. There were about 100 people there and none of them knew about the New Horizons program. It is, of course, still fresh in our minds and we still have a lot to learn about it from experience. So, for a very small sum of money, here would be an opportunity to engage a lot of people in a project that might prove very worthwhile. The stories and reminiscences that they have might be very valuable to our generation and future generations. But there is another dimension to it. These people who presently wake up on a Monday morning and ask what they are going to do until their euchre game on Wednesday are going to be able to say that they have to be ready for their project on Wednesday. Each day, therefore, is no longer a dull day, another day waiting for the euchre game on Wednesday. They will have a different focus each week, which is something that is very worthwhile.

There is another town in my riding, the town of Vaughan, which is really a township made up of a lot of small towns and farming area. The senior citizens there have formed a Senate. We have our own Senate of senior citizens, too, but this is a different sort of Senate. They have representatives from the towns of Woodbridge, Maple, Thornhill, Concord and Nashville who come together and decide among themselves what kind of programs are needed in the area. So that they do not duplicate the work, the group from Nashville takes on one program and the group from Woodbridge takes on another. This is a great idea and prompted me to suggest to the minister that it would be very worthwhile to have an advisory council such as in the town of Vaughan for all of the senior citizens programs.

A lot of benefit can be derived just from meeting and talking about problems. This provides input and the whole thing is co-ordinated by the director of recreation in the municipality, who is probably in his mid to late twenties. He is as excited about the program as are the old people themselves. It appeared to me that we could expand this idea even further and get our senior citizens more involved in the program if we had a national advisory council so that the thrust of the program is maintained and oriented in ways with which the senior citizens can identify. Then, perhaps regional advisory boards of senior citizens could be set up to provide a channel of communication with the minister who is primarily concerned with their interests. This is very important, not only to the success of the program, but so that the senior citizens themselves feel tuned in to the institutions of their country as well as to their government.