

Disabled Persons Act

has been placed before the house in the motion moved by the hon. member for Simcoe North (Mr. Smith) and I hope that hon. members who are present will permit this motion to be voted on before six o'clock.

Mr. H. A. Olson (Medicine Hat): Mr. Speaker, I notice there are a number of members who want to speak on this notice of motion and for that reason I am going to be very brief. I want to say that we extend our congratulations to the hon. member for Simcoe North (Mr. Smith) for bringing forward this notice of motion again.

I was interested in the remarks made by the hon. member for Halton (Mr. Harley) when he spoke of the interpretation of what total and permanent disability means. In my experience this has been the biggest problem we have had. I believe that one of the major improvements that could be made in applying the regulations under the Disabled Persons Act would be to take into consideration the matter of income as opposed to permanent medical disability. After all, the provision of money by way of a pension certainly is not going to do very much toward correcting the medical problem, and in my opinion the legislation is specifically designed to provide income for those people who have disabilities of such a nature that they are prevented from earning income. Therefore I think the emphasis should be placed on the consideration of whether or not the individual applying for a pension can in fact earn any income. If the present interpretation or definition of permanent and total disability, from a medical point of view, is to be the criterion, then I think we are losing sight of the purpose of the act which is to provide income for people who are disabled in such a way that they are unable to earn it themselves.

Over the years I think most members of the house have had experiences in attempting to get applications for disability pensions approved. Almost invariably you run up against the question of what permanent disability means. My experience has been that unless a person is almost confined to bed, disabled to the point where he cannot even move around the house and cannot do anything, quite apart from being able to earn income, the application is not approved. So some credence can be given to what the hon. member for Halton has said, that perhaps the present wording of the regulations would be satisfactory if they were applied a little differently. I hope that when the government is ready to make changes in the application of the act they will give high priority to

the consideration of the ability to earn income rather than the degree of medical disability.

In the province of Alberta the provincial government has recognized the shortcomings of the federal act and of a number of other acts where the province and the federal government co-operate in providing pensions. They have proceeded to set up what they call social allowances for people who find themselves in a position where they cannot quite qualify under the regulations of the federal act. The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) may be interested in this because, as he has pointed out, he has a notice of motion standing on the order paper, in fact the very next one, which is designed to fill some of the gaps. I think that he and other members of the house could benefit from studying what the province of Alberta has done during the past few months.

Today the social welfare agency of the province of Alberta considers each application on the basis of the individual merits and individual needs of the case. No specific pension is predetermined as used to be the case. They take into consideration the cost of living, including such things as food, clothing and shelter. They even take into consideration the matter of drugs. After all these factors are considered they arrive at a monthly payment, call it a pension if you will, that will meet these requirements.

In addition, Alberta has now embarked on a rather large program of building nursing care hospitals or custodial hospitals, if you prefer that term. These are designed for people who are disabled but have afflictions of a nature not requiring active hospital treatment. They are not even in the category of those who would be accepted into auxiliary or chronic care hospitals. These new hospitals are designed for people who are unable to take care of themselves.

I can foresee a situation developing where it will be substantially cheaper for a number of disabled people to be committed to these nursing care hospitals and it will cost Canadian taxpayers more to keep them there than to provide a reasonable pension enabling them to stay at home. If some income were provided to take care of the purchase of drugs and other necessities of life, in many cases these people could quite adequately be taken care of in their own homes. In some cases I think this would be more satisfactory to the persons involved and more