

*Senior Citizens*

the opportunity to speak on Bill C-218 which was introduced by the hon. member for York-Sunbury (Mr. Howie). Like him, I too have great concern about the needs of the senior citizens, but in reading Bill C-218, one wonders what the proposed senior citizens' commission could be expected to accomplish. The bill states that the commission is to study and identify the needs of senior citizens and make recommendations concerning these needs to the governor in council.

The establishment of a commission such as that proposed in the bill would more appropriately be a matter for action by the provinces. Indeed, some provincial governments have appointed bodies to identify the needs of older people, make recommendations on how these needs can be met, serve in an advisory capacity in the establishment of programs and services to meet the needs, identify gaps in information and services, promote research, and, in some cases, carry out research. Called by any one of several names, such as senior citizens commission, advisory council, or provincial senior citizens council, these bodies are appointed by government and responsible to a provincial minister of the Crown.

Several provinces have bodies operating under voluntary auspices either as independent councils on aging or as divisions of provincial social planning councils. In some urban centres, similar structures have been organized locally. In addition, some provinces have an office, bureau or division on aging, usually located in the department of social services. All these bodies are engaged in identifying the needs of older people and in establishing, in co-operation with other bodies, services for them.

Such developments are not surprising when the needs of older people are considered, namely, economic needs, physical and mental health, nutrition, living arrangements, transportation, leisure activities, education, employment, retirement and spiritual wellbeing. The federal government's responsibility in the economic sphere is fully recognized. Furthermore, federal financial participation with the provinces in the development of health and social services as well as the construction of housing and institutional care facilities has been in effect for many years. But the fact is that health and social services, housing, institutional care facilities, education and so on, are all under provincial jurisdiction.

There are those who argue that if older people were provided with enough money, they could look after their own needs. We have heard some of that rhetoric this afternoon. This is a fallacious argument. It assumes that the services needed are available, that they are accessible, and that whatever their cost old people could afford to pay for them regardless of the quantity required or the length of time the services are needed. The recognition of the lack of supportive services to help elderly persons to live independently in their own community, despite socioeconomic and physical problems, was the motive behind the federal government's initiative in introducing the social services act in Bill C-57 during the second session of the thirtieth parliament.

**Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** What happened to it?

[Mr. Andres.]

**Mr. Andres:** The announcement by the province of Quebec of its opposition to the cost sharing arrangements between the federal and provincial governments, and the lack of enthusiasm of a number of other provinces including Ontario, resulted in the bill's withdrawal. Admittedly, there was no guarantee under the proposed social services act that the provincial governments would include or extend services, but the federal government had opened the door for the development, with federal participation, of services as wide ranging as those of homemaker or home help, handyman or handywoman, preparation of meals, laundry, counselling services, day care for adults, special transportation, volunteer visiting and information and referral.

The problems of the aged and aging are as diverse as those which afflict all of society. We know, however, that the aged of the 1970s are very different from those of the 1950s and 1960s. Those of the 1980s will show even greater differences. It is estimated that about two-thirds of those aged 65 and over have no single identifying characteristic except age—they mingle largely unnoticed in the community. Indeed, the majority of older people can function in the community if society permits and encourages them through the provision of special services. Thus, an integral part of the planning process should be the provision of services and resources which would provide opportunities for senior citizens to participate in the community.

The New Horizons program of the Department of National Health and Welfare was established five years ago to help and encourage retired people to engage in activities of benefit to themselves and other members of their community. The result has been a dramatic increase in the number of community groups established by, and for, retired and elderly persons. Many of these groups have joined provincial and national senior citizens organizations, and these organizations have become extremely effective in speaking on behalf of their members. No one could be more thoroughly familiar than they are with the needs and aspirations of retired and elderly people.

On many occasions these organizations met with the former minister of national health and welfare, the present Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations (Mr. Lalonde), to discuss their concerns and to present their recommendations for improving the quality of life for retired Canadians. Many of their proposals have been incorporated in government programs for pensioners, and there is a continuing dialogue between the department and the spokesmen for senior citizens organizations. Ways of making this dialogue even more effective are being considered.

The Department of National Health and Welfare has recently granted funds to one New Horizons project group, composed of very knowledgeable seniors from across Canada, to undertake an independent look at the kinds of structure that might be most effective as a focus for the concerns about aging at the national level. Furthermore, they are presently considering with the provinces the merits of holding a national symposium to examine a range of issues related to this very