

I do not intend to talk much longer about these votes. I listened with attention to my hon. friend from Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) who this afternoon lambasted the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde) for not bringing forward the old age pension legislation today, or one month ago or whenever he felt it should have been introduced.

I listened carefully as my socialist friend suggested that the minister should name the figure that the old age pensioners are to receive. I do not blame government officials for not mentioning the amount of money that senior citizens are to receive. However, as a backbencher of the Liberal party I am by no means afraid to mention figures. I feel, Mr. Speaker, that our senior citizens deserve every cent that Canada can afford. But I say to my socialist friends, when they say the pension for people 65 years of age and over should be at least \$150, that they are whistling Dixie; that Canada cannot afford it; that some of our senior citizens are quite wealthy.

Surely the hon. member knows that Canadians cannot afford to pay such a sum. Whenever somebody suggests such programs for Canada I wonder where the money is to come from. I appreciate the sentiments of my friend from Winnipeg North Centre when he advocates increased old age pensions, additional funds for CNR pensions, improved Canada Pension Plan payments, and so on—we all agree with those sentiments—but sympathy in the heart of mankind is not confined to members of the socialist party; it is to be found even in Conservatives and certainly exists in the hearts of Liberals because they have done more for pensioners than any other party in the history of Canada.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Whicher: Having said that, I impress upon my friends across the way and upon those in my own party that we can only afford to give what our younger people can afford to pay. At the present time the old age pension system in Canada is better than that of any country in the world. Tax exemptions in Canada are higher than those of any country in the world. Hospitalization and medicare provisions are just as good as those of any other country.

Having said that, I would be the first to agree that pensions should be increased. However, I suggest—I suppose I will be the only Liberal backbencher to say this—that when the Minister of National Health and Welfare brings in the bill to provide additional funds for our senior citizens he must remember that somebody has to pay for the increase. I hope he will use judgment and remember that the sons and daughters of senior citizens must pay for increased pensions.

• (1540)

In conclusion, let no one say after I have finished or at any other time that I am against additional benefits for our senior citizens. My mother, father, mother-in-law and father-in-law are senior citizens and pensioners. Naturally, no one would like to see them receive more pension than I would. Therefore my sympathy is with pensioners. However, as the father of five children my sympathy is also with the youth of this country. Having said that, I am very pleased to be able to vote for a bill that provides \$1

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million not just for my children but for all children across Canada in order to make them more fit and also to improve amateur sport across this great nation of ours.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Cyril Symes (Sault Ste. Marie): Mr. Speaker, I rise to discuss the \$1 million supplementary estimate put forward by the government for the fitness and amateur sport program, as well as the Conservative motion that no more than \$1 be spent on this program.

I have found the debate very interesting, especially the earlier debate on the supplementary estimate for the \$1 million New Horizons program. I discussed this issue with a number of senior citizens last weekend. They were quite keen and enthusiastic about the program. They have some plans ready. The friends of the pensioners and the old age people in Canada, the Conservatives, have moved that no more than \$1 be spent on this program. Not only have they slapped the faces of the pensioners but they have moved the same type of motion in respect of the program for the young people of Canada.

I find this very ironic, especially in the context of the issue of fitness and amateur sport, because it was a Conservative government in 1961 that introduced the Fitness and Amateur Sport Act. The purpose of the act was to encourage, promote and develop fitness and amateur sport in Canada. What has been the success of that act? The act was instigated from the revelation of lack of physical fitness among Canadians of all age groups, especially the young. It was designed to alleviate this problem in Canada. If you look at the breakdown of expenditures under the act since 1961, you will see that most of the money has gone to the top; in other words, in financing competitions rather than going down to the base, that is, broadening participation in amateur sports.

We have the problem of lack of physical fitness in Canadians. We have a problem with sports in general. There is a conflict between professional sports in this country and amateur sports and which is to have precedence in government priorities and the support of the Canadian people. We also have the problem that we are fast becoming a nation of spectators with regard to sports.

I would like to examine for a few minutes some of the reasons for this problem. One reason can be traced to the school system throughout this country. I was formerly a school teacher. I observed the physical education programs in the schools. I noted that their primary emphasis was not on the student body as a whole but on developing students who could excel in team sports such as football and basketball. The ordinary student who does not have great physical or sports prowess is soon discouraged; all the attention is lavished on those students who can excel in these sports. The extracurricular sports activity in schools is downplayed and downgraded.

Another problem is lack of opportunity for the public to make use of sports facilities, especially those in schools. Only recently did local boards of education open up the schools in the evenings in order for the general public to participate. Many school boards are still reluctant to do so. There is lack of opportunity with regard to available facilities. We have only to think of many of our summer