

We have paid our tributes to them today. We have all said pious things. We have talked about how great they are and about the great debt we owe the senior citizens of Canada. Yet more is required if we are to serve them. We must give them the opportunity to help themselves, and the first thing we must do is help them to tell us about the kinds of projects they can undertake. If we could adopt the sort of guides that have been used in the Opportunities for Youth program, extend them and innovate in this respect. The government, I am sure, will be happy to consider the suggestions of our senior citizens.

• (1750)

Mr. Robert P. Kaplan (Don Valley): Mr. Speaker, before I direct myself to the terms of the motion before us I wish to say a few words in support of the point made by my distinguished colleague, the hon. member for Ottawa West (Mr. Francis). It should be recognized by all members, certainly the senior members of this House, who were catcalling while he was speaking, that private members' hour is more an opportunity to put forward and build support for ideas than a time for passing resolutions. I think much is achieved if members on all sides of the House speak in favour of a resolution. Support is built up and their interest in the subject is drawn to the attention of the country and the government. It is mean for hon. members opposite to exploit any of us or this hour to allege that we have ulterior motives in speaking on the motions before us. I am sure they will agree that we have the same rights as them.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kaplan: Let me now turn to the resolution before us. In very large measure, the aged of Canada, our senior citizens, already have been considerable beneficiaries of the Opportunities for Youth program. It is true they have not received payments under it and they have not been hired under any of the programs toward which Opportunities for Youth is directed. That was not the intention of the program.

I have reviewed a large number of these projects and many are directed toward their needs and problems. I do not have time to give many examples. In my constituency there was an Opportunities for Youth program that provided free for senior citizens the services of young people to carry parcels from shopping areas to their homes, assist with repairs to senior citizens' property and generally support them in their role in the community. This is a very desirable benefit that senior citizens received from the Opportunities for Youth program.

Why did the Opportunities for Youth program not direct itself toward the employment of senior citizens? I think the reason is easy to understand: the Opportunities for Youth program was directed primarily toward providing employment for people who were badly in need of an interested in obtaining work. Statistics make it very clear that the unemployed of Canada are largely young people between the ages of 18 and 25. I understand that through this program the government was not trying to create employment in the public sector for its own sake; rather, it was directing itself toward two objectives. One was to try to combat the serious problem of employment among

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young people—in this dimension the program was very successful—the other was to enrich life in Canada by providing services to communities through our young people. The benefits achieved by the Opportunities for Youth program were very considerable. There were no handouts or grants. The money the young people received was earned through work which the community in which they lived agreed was valuable and ought to be done.

One other point about the Opportunities for Youth program is that its costs, when set out in a balance sheet, exclude a very major factor that commends the policy. The balance sheet does not show the fact that many of the people who came into the Opportunities for Youth program were on welfare. All of them were unemployed. Although not all of them were receiving unemployment insurance payments, many of them were. When you look at the absolute figures as a ground for condemning the program, you should bear in mind that the cost was offset by considerable savings not only in federal programs, such as unemployment insurance and welfare, but in savings to provinces and municipalities which bear part of the cost of welfare.

I believe this program should be extended so that senior citizens may use their imagination and initiative—I think the resolution states it very well—to enrich their communities and become active in projects. I repeat, much of the cost of this program can be offset by savings in the guaranteed income supplement, unemployment insurance and welfare benefits. The program is not as expensive as it seems. Notwithstanding the special reasons for limiting the program in the past to participation by youth, it should now be extended to the aged. They have a contribution to make.

In conclusion I wish to direct one point to the government. It is too easy for a government to be crisis-oriented, to consider responsibility as putting out fires and dealing with despair, confrontation and demands of sectors of the country which are prepared to put their case in terms of ultimatums. The senior citizens of Canada do not do that; nor do some other segments of society. It is important for the government to recognize that running the country and responding to its needs is more than a matter of dealing with crises and putting out fires: it is also a matter of recognizing that there is an element of good will among people who want to serve society. There are many people with enthusiasm, energy and good will toward their fellow men and their communities. They want to help and have ideas for helping. There must be room in the government's list of priorities to utilize this tremendous Canadian resource.

Mr. Harding: Will the hon. member permit a question?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger): Does the hon. member agree?

Mr. Kaplan: No, Mr. Speaker. I will answer the question after.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): After what?

Mr. Kaplan: It is very easy to respond to crises. The government must respond to crises. But in many countries, particularly our neighbour to the south, we see the