

Senior Citizens Advisory Assembly Act

Bill C-224 today, or at least have the subject matter referred to the appropriate standing committee.

With an issue of this magnitude, affecting thousands upon thousands of individuals, it is only right that Members put their political affiliation out of mind for one moment and bring to mind the urgent requirement for a seniors' Parliament. It is the responsibility of every Member of this House to represent to the best of their ability the interests of their constituents. In adopting this Bill or its subject matter the people of Canada will realize that their individual needs are being recognized and, most importantly, being acted upon. All senior citizens in Canada join me today in requesting the support of the House in its entirety to enable them the opportunity to collectively represent themselves to this Government.

Mr. Neil Young (Beaches): Mr. Speaker, I do not intend to spend too much time speaking to this Bill because the merit of the Bill itself speak quite eloquently to the need for such a measure proposed by the Hon. Member. It gives me some pleasure to have the opportunity to speak to Bill C-224, an Act to Constitute a Senior Citizens Advisory Assembly.

Anyone who has examined or paid any attention to the problems senior citizens have in our society would be quite willing, and indeed enthusiastic, to give their support to this particular measure. It is quite true that there are numerous organizations in the country which represent seniors' groups and which, to one degree or another, are quite vocal in their advocacy on behalf of seniors and their rights in society. One real need which exists is that seniors to be involved in the process of decision making which affects their lives directly, rather than the simple paternalistic approach that has been used toward seniors by people in authority, people in Government and politicians in the past. This particular Bill provides a unique mechanism to provide for that kind of input.

I thought the need was spelled out very well in the Canadian non-governmental organization's report on aging which was presented to the Minister of Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) in preparation for the world assembly on aging held in Vienna in Autumn of 1982. I would like to quote in part from that particular report because I think it says it all. It said that a prime target emerged during the discussions that took place on this report itself. It said:

It is the matter of involvement of senior citizens in affairs in which they have a stake. Seniors must be involved in the development of policies and programs which affect them. This applies to all levels of government, social agencies and senior centers. The past and present relationships, in general, consider older persons to be consumers rather than partners in the action.

Acceptance of seniors as partners in the decision-making process requires a re-educating of politicians, officials, professionals and older persons themselves.

Our discussion-participants say this partnership must be a goal if the status of older persons in Canadian society, is of importance.

No government has the right to decide on the lifestyle or way of thinking of older persons, but it must help them improve their quality of life.

If this Bill were to be accepted and the provisions within the Bill made a reality it would go a long way to accomplishing what seniors obviously desire in this country, that is to have real input into the decisions being made which affect their

lives. As I said previously, I think the mechanisms provided in this Bill would go a long way towards accomplishing that.

Mrs. Ursula Appolloni (York South-Weston): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity today to speak on Bill C-224. This Bill would establish an advisory assembly of senior citizens to assist the federal Government in developing policies and providing services for Canada's ever increasing number in this segment of the population.

I would first like to say I am in complete agreement with the Hon. Member for Winnipeg-Assiniboine (Mr. McKenzie) concerning the need for input from older Canadians with respect to the development of policies and programs which affect them. However, let me hasten to add that the Government has always made a concerted effort to obtain the opinions of seniors concerning their own needs and the development of policies and programs which address those needs. Thus, I am proud of the many initiatives taken by the federal Government over the years to help our older citizens.

● (1800)

One of the most dramatic examples of public participation, including that of the elderly, has been the process of reforming Canada's retirement income system, sometimes referred to as the "Great Pension Debate". Since the early 1970s, when several reports identified major shortcomings in both public and private pensions, there have been innumerable briefs, reports, conferences, seminars, workshops and task forces to discuss these problems and recommend changes to alleviate them.

Briefly, Canada's public pension system consists of the Old Age Security Program which currently provides a pension of \$266.28 per month to everyone aged 65 and over who meet residency requirements. An additional pension, the Guaranteed Income Supplement, is payable to OAS recipients who have little or no income from private sources. Currently, the maximum GIS is \$267.33 per month at a single rate and \$206.11 per month at the married rate. If the spouse of an OAS recipient is over age 60 but not yet 65, she or he may be entitled to a spouses allowance, an income tested benefit which is equivalent to OAS plus GIS at the married rate, currently \$472.39 per month. Thus, a single elderly person is currently guaranteed an income of at least \$533.61 per month. A couple, one of whom is aged 65 or over and the other at least 60, is guaranteed \$944.78 per month. These guarantees are increased quarterly to increases in the consumer price index. Also, several provinces have income tested programs which would provide additional guarantees to many GIS and spouses allowance recipients.

The other major public pension programs are the Canada and Quebec Pension Plans. These are earnings related plans to which virtually all employed persons in Canada contribute. Benefits from these two plans are fully indexed annually to increases in the CPI. They provide for retirement pensions as well as protection against death and disability. Currently, the maximum retirement pension is \$387.50 per month.