

*Private Members' Business*

I want to commend the hon. member on his praiseworthy suggestion that throughout Canada, and each year, the second Sunday in September shall be known as grandparent's day. He can count on my full support and that of the Bloc Québécois. I have a special interest in this proposal, being myself a grandfather and representing the riding of Bourassa in Montreal North, where 15 per cent of the population is in the 65 and over age group.

In 1994, the AQDR of Montreal North was founded as a branch of the Association québécoise pour la défense des droits des personnes retraitées et pré-retraitées, whose basic objective is to improve the living conditions of this group: income, taxes, health, accommodations, transportation, social policies and so forth. The organization already has more than 300 members.

I would like to express in the House my profound gratitude and best wishes to the members of the executive elected at the annual meeting held on May 29, the day before yesterday: Jean-Claude Potvin, president; Roger Lagacé, vice-president; Pierrette Vallières, secretary; Martine Leduc, treasurer; and advisers Umberto di Genova, Audette Thibault, Régine Daigle, Guy Baril, Claude Ouimet, Pierre Grondin and Joseph Zara. Like many other seniors, these people do a lot of volunteer work and are known for their dedication and generosity.

Bill C-274 is justified in every respect. This day should have been established long ago. Fortunately, a number of provinces and municipalities as well as many organizations and seniors' homes already unofficially celebrate a day known as grandparent's day. I think the time has come to officially recognize the second Sunday in September of each year as the day on which we pay tribute to our seniors and especially to grandparents.

In 1978, U.S. President Jimmy Carter decided that the first Sunday after Labour Day would be set aside to pay tribute to grandparents. A dynamic and remarkable grandmother from West Virginia, Marion McQuade, had fought for years to have a special day set aside for senior citizens in the United States. I hope that Canada will be inspired by this example and act accordingly.

The government, in particular the Minister of Canadian Heritage, must take the lead on this issue. Grandparents are extremely important for their grandchildren, especially until they reach adolescence.

Seniors are becoming a proportionately larger sector of our population. We estimate that their numbers will increase by 40 per cent in the next 15 years. Therefore, the government must take real steps to recognize the important contribution they make to society. Unfortunately, despite its many promises, the Liberal government has done nothing to improve the situation of seniors.

• (1820)

On the contrary, they cut their tax credits, and, knowing this government's philosophy and vision, it is quite likely that they will take even more away from them, in particular in the area of old age security benefits.

Furthermore, I would ask the government to stop reducing grants for organizations which finance seniors, in particular programs like New Horizons.

I have had the great joy of being a grandfather for two years now. In fact, the wife of my oldest son gave birth to little Olivia in 1993 when the election campaign was in full swing. My whole family, including the child, was a great help to me during that period. I regret that my work as a parliamentarian does not leave me much time to play with and take care of my granddaughter Olivia.

According to recent statistics, 90 per cent of all children have at least one living grandparent. Unfortunately for me, my grandparents all passed away before I was born. I even lost my mother and father when I was 11 and 13 years old respectively. Admittedly, one half a century ago in Chili, a developing country, life expectancy was not very high.

The fact that I never knew my grandparents did not prevent me from understanding and valuing their importance for families and society, be it for children, adolescents or adults. They convey stability, link the generations and transmit certain fundamental values which must be preserved. And today, with so many break-ups in couples, their role has become even more important. In certain instances, they are the ones who raise their grandchildren and care for them.

Three Canadians out of four 65 years of age or older are grandparents. Naturally, you do not have to be 65 to be a grandparent. Some grandparents today are even in their forties or fifties.

I am proud to point out that Quebec has officially recognized the role of grandparents in article 611 of the Civil Code, which reads as follows: "In no case may the father or mother, without a grave reason, interfere with personal relations between the child and his grandparents".

This provision, therefore, accords grandparents the right to visit and take their grandchildren out. Unless there is an agreement between the parties, the terms of these relations are decided by the court. In all cases, the judge will consider the welfare of the children first and will consult them as need be.

Grandparents are very concerned about the happiness and well-being of the children and do everything within their power to improve their world.

For all these reasons, I enthusiastically support Bill C-274.