

Health and Welfare

government in this field. It must be apparent that this situation involves a severe and, I am sure, critical hardship for many Canadians.

The province of Nova Scotia has for some time now made insulin available to those who require it, free of charge, if they meet certain basic requirements. Drugs for our senior citizens could be made available in a similar manner if the government had the desire to meet this chronic problem head-on and show some compassion.

I hope that as a result of this debate the government will accept this matter as one of priority and introduce a program that will solve the problem. Before I resume my seat let me say that I hope those who take part in the debate will not say immediately, "But this is going to cost millions of dollars and we cannot afford it." I hope no member will say that.

Mr. Bell: They would not dare.

Mr. Muir: It seems that governments can find money for almost everything. You name it, and they can find money for it. Apparently there is money for the most unusual and fantastic ideas. If someone asks, "Where are you going to get the money for this program?" let me suggest, as the leader of my party has suggested, that disbanding Information Canada would release \$10 million. That is a start. Or look at the Auditor General's reports. They are interesting reading. Over the past ten years you will find that there has been a flagrant waste of millions of dollars which have gone by the wayside without producing results. By eliminating the wastes referred to in those reports we could find additional millions of dollars.

Before I sit down let me say that we send out in the form of loans and grants every year millions and millions of dollars in foreign aid. I hope that no member will immediately throw up his hands in horror and say, "Muir is against foreign aid; isn't that shocking?" Well, it is not so shocking. Let me say immediately that I am not against foreign aid to emerging countries and those who require it. It is not so shocking when you consider the number of senior citizens living in hovels and garrets despite the latest small increase in the old age pension. It is not so shocking when you know that some people are terribly ill and are coming to the end of the road much sooner than they would normally because they cannot buy drugs. I am sure all of us—particularly the medical men who sit in this chamber—know how important drugs are, and their cost escalates all the time.

In the debate that will follow I hope members will put their thoughts on record. I hope the government will reach the point quickly of asking the minister to introduce a bill—and it could be a simple bill—that would provide for free drugs for all those who qualify for the guaranteed income supplement.

Mr. S. Victor Railton (Welland): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on this motion and to compliment the hon. member for Cape Breton-The Sydneys (Mr. Muir) for voicing such widely held sentiments. I think there is not a member here who does not agree that it would be nice if we could pass immediately the sort of bill the hon. member has proposed. However, there are many matters which must be dis-

[Mr. Muir.]

cussed. I think we should consider the whole subject of medical aid coming under welfare.

It seems to me that the hon. member's motion is similar to that moved by the hon. member for Oxford (Mr. Nesbitt). Both motions are dated January 12 and both are along the same lines. The motion of the hon. member who preceded me is pretty well confined to matters involving OAS and GIS, whereas the hon. member for Oxford, when he talked on his motion, tabled about anyone in need. The motion standing in the name of the hon. member for Oxford was debated on April 2 and the whole question of poverty was discussed.

Although there is much repetition in our debates on this subject, and although some may consider this old hat, we must realize that many things have been said about poverty in the last two or three years and that poverty has been defined. Of course, I am referring to the Croll report. The committee, headed by that senator, went all over Canada and arrived at certain conclusions. We know, to make a long story short, that about 25 per cent of the population of Canada, which at present stands at around 22 million, consists of people living on, near or below the poverty line. What is the poverty level? It was defined at that time as the level that applied to anyone who lived at what we would call the minimum level, which is represented by an income of about \$4,000 a year. Such income, of course, would not provide for any extras. That definition still applies, I believe, and I think this House still accepts it in its discussions.

I believe parliament thought it had gone a long way when it increased veterans pensions by several hundred dollars per year. The hon. member mentioned the guaranteed income supplement. He was referring, I think, to the guaranteed annual income which in some ways is similar to the concept of the veterans pension. It is interesting to note that many people look on the poor with pity and contempt. A report which was recently issued dealt with poor people, people on welfare and people who have had to accept charity. It has been shown that people in that unfortunate position are not welfare bums. Ninety-eight per cent of them want to work. I think everyone in the country realizes that. Since unemployment insurance was introduced there has been so much talk about people who do not want to work that I am getting sick of it. Most people whom I as a doctor have looked after are not in that category. If people are properly trained, educated and able to find a job, they are eager to work.

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Another finding in the study is that children in this group by no means inherit a lazy or inborn welfare attitude. In fact, some of the finest brains and contributors to our society come from that group. First and foremost we must realize that poverty is another disease and we have to do our best to cure it. How many people are in this group? From discussions with those who wrote the report it appears there are approximately 5.5 million.

Another statistic indicates that the annual cost of prescription drugs—this does not include aspirin Lydia Pinkham and other drugs sold over the counter but only drugs prescribed by doctors after examination—amounts to \$14.12 for every person in Canada. In another area, we have been