

*Private Members' Business*

At the same time society does change and so do the needs which our social programs must address. One trend likely to impact on social programs is our aging population.

Over the next 40 years the proportion of people in our country over the age of 65 will double as well as the proportion of those age 65 and over will increase even more quickly, doubling by the year 2011. By 2031 the number of people over 65 compared with the number of working age Canadians will fall from one in five to one in three.

Clearly these realities must be addressed. To this end the government is studying these issues and will shortly release a paper on the challenges and opportunities posed by our aging society.

This paper will address the full range of issues relating to our aging population and will examine what must be done by governments, employers, working age individuals and families to plan for their future. It will examine the changing roles and needs of our seniors as Canadians live longer and healthier lives. It will look at services and labour market issues and whether changes are required to the public pension system to ensure it remains sustainable. It will also examine the current tax treatment of private savings for retirement.

We all know that planning for an aging society cannot be done overnight. We simply cannot engage in short term thinking to such long term issues. With this in mind the government has committed itself to examining these long term trends so as to ensure that future generations of Canadians will have the same level of security currently enjoyed by our seniors.

To do this it will be necessary to define a set of efficient and compassionate programs to meet our future needs. The release of the discussion paper in the coming months will be the first step.

Of course, any future programs must continue to be fiscally responsible and fully sustainable. These are fundamental issues and to ensure success the government will need the active and informed participation of all Canadians as it seeks to arrive at a consensus on the direction that policies and programs should take.

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For instance, older Canadians have declared that they want to be involved in developing solutions. Their voices must be heard as must those of other concerned Canadians. As we move forward with this review, we cannot lose sight of the fact that we have a great deal to be proud of. Our current programs are rooted in a great tradition which is the basis of the caring society Canada has become today.

Today seniors are financially more secure than those of any previous generation. With the planned development of Canada's

income security system over the past few decades there has been a substantial decrease in the incidence of poverty among older Canadians. For example, between 1980 and 1992 the incidence of low income among seniors fell from one-third to less than 21 per cent. While single elderly women continue to have a much higher incidence of low income, 53 per cent in 1992, this figure was down significantly from 70 per cent in 1980.

The situation is by no means perfect. Overall seniors incomes are still modest. In a recent survey on aging and independence more than 60 per cent of those between ages of 65 and 69 years named government pensions as their main source of personal income. Still all Canadians can be proud of the network of government programs that have helped to improve the standard of living of seniors in Canada. For instance, the basic OAS pension together with the guaranteed income supplement and spousal allowance ensure financial security, especially for the poorest Canadians as they approach and enter retirement.

The Canada pension plan together with its sister program, the Quebec pension plan, is the social insurance program to which working Canadians contribute. It provides not only retirement income but a measure of income protection against disability and death. The Canada-wide portable coverage these programs give is a great example of what federal and provincial governments can achieve by working together.

Together these programs have made a significant contribution to the economic security of Canada's seniors. Although there is an increasing number of people living well beyond age 65 years, fewer are living in poverty. Proof of the success of this network of programs becomes clear every month as millions of people receive their pension benefits from the government reliably and on time.

In Canada in the late 20th century we can be proud of the initiative and the planning which almost 30 years ago laid the groundwork for the satisfying life of retirement which more and more Canadians are enjoying.

This is not to say that our retirement income system does not need examination, review and revision. In the past we have regularly examined our income security programs, reviewed them in light of changes in our society, and revised them to respond to those changes. We must be prepared to consider changes as they become necessary. We must maintain a sound system based on the foundations of the past and responsive to the needs of the future.

I conclude by urging all members of the House to be active participants in this process of examining our current system, deciding what we as a society want and putting in place a strategy for tomorrow.