

Supply—Health and Welfare

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman, I have one question I would like to direct to the minister. This is a matter I mentioned when I spoke yesterday. Is the minister contemplating any action in response to the request for guiding allowances for the blind?

Mr. Martin: Perhaps I could now deal with these things, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank the hon. member for Lethbridge for the care which he has given to this matter as have other hon. members.

As I said yesterday, we are all interested in the matter of old age security and I feel it is a question which rightly has engaged the attention of the committee. I am proud of any particular opportunity I have had as the Minister of National Health and Welfare during the past few years to deal with this matter. This is the field in which I have been privileged in the name of the government to bring forward very substantial reforms in raising the amount and increasing the income ceiling to the point where we have doubled the pension in the period in which I have had the opportunity of serving in this department. I am not taking any credit for this; I am simply mentioning it.

We are at a point now where 43 per cent of our whole departmental budget is for the assistance we give to the aged. No country in the world is using as much of the departmental budget for its aged citizens as is Canada.

Everything that is said about the difficulties of the aged is fully appreciated, I am sure, by every hon. member of this house no matter where he sits. These grants are maintenance grants. They could not possibly provide, as no social security measure does, for the full maintenance of the group concerned; however, I can assure the house that this particular matter is receiving very active attention on my part and on the part of the department.

There are a number of things we have in mind. I do not know whether or not we will be able to bring them forward but I can assure the house there is no problem that concerns me more than this particular one. My only comfort in the matter is that we are now providing on federal account 95 per cent of the total cost of pensions in Canada, something close to \$400 million for assistance to 870,000 people today as compared with about 90,000 three years ago. That represents a tremendous achievement. The house may be assured that the matter will continue to receive all the interest I can possibly give it.

With regard to guiding allowances, that is a matter which has to be taken into consideration with the provinces because it is

[Mr. Hellyer.]

a joint proposition. There is to be a meeting of the interprovincial board in the month of October or thereabouts when that and some other considerations we have in mind will be discussed.

Mr. Green: Mr. Chairman, may I ask the minister a question? What about the blind who are 70 years of age and over? This has nothing to do with the provinces and is purely a federal matter.

Mr. Martin: Yes, I know, but it has to be taken into consideration as it will be.

Mr. Zaplitny: The question has been raised of the review of the residence requirements for these applicants for old age pensions. I have taken the matter up with the minister privately on two or three occasions and I would like him to comment on the representations made by the hon. members for Edmonton East and Davenport.

Mr. Martin: I indicated that yesterday. The hon. member for Vancouver-Quadra raised that question last night and I indicated to him that that matter was being considered along with several other suggestions that he made. I am aware of that problem and it has to be considered along with our assistance program because the period of residence is the same for old age assistance and for old age security. In the former case, because there is provincial participation, we have to consult the provinces. We try to make these things as uniform as we can. The hon. member may be assured, as may the hon. member who raised it and the hon. member for Davenport, that it is being studied.

Item agreed to.

Civil defence—

281. To provide for the civil defence program, \$7,010,018.

Mr. Pearkes: Mr. Chairman, when the estimates of this department were before the estimates committee very careful consideration was given to the items dealing with civil defence and many hours' discussion took place. We appreciated the minister's frank statements during those discussions and particularly the day when we were in camera. It is not my purpose, therefore, to speak at any great length today on this subject of civil defence.

During those discussions in the committee the members of that committee from this party made our position quite clear. We believe that reasonable steps should be taken to keep the nation informed as to the nature and the effect of damage which might be caused from the explosion of thermonuclear bombs should another global war take place and those devastating weapons be used. We