

Suggested Reduction of Pension Age

far as this party is concerned, we would hope that this kind of motion would be supported for several reasons.

I believe that if it were accepted and the government did in fact change the old age security qualifications by reducing the age to 67 it might in fact be an economic asset to the country, rather than costing money. I say that for this reason. Every year for the past number of years we have had an unemployment problem in the country and a large number of those on the unemployment rolls, to whom we must make payments through the unemployment insurance commission, are younger people just entering the labour market. So, Mr. Speaker, while we agree that the age limit could and should be lowered and that the means test should be removed, we think there is perhaps some merit in suggesting that one qualification should remain, namely that persons in this age group be retired. At the present time we know that there are two considerations so far as the means test is concerned. One is income and the other is assets. I have no objection at all to removing any consideration of the assets a senior citizen may have acquired in his lifetime from what is now considered to be the means test.

However, I think it would be well to retain as a qualification for receiving this pension that the applicant be retired. This would, of course, open up additional opportunities for the younger people to move into the labour market. I am thankful to the hon. member for New Westminster (Mr. Mather) for providing us with statistics. He said there were something like 286,000 Canadians in this age group. I do not believe there is any way of knowing, at least the hon. member did not provide us with this information, how many of the people in this age group are today holding jobs. If these people were eligible for pension when they retired, these jobs would become available to younger Canadians. Surely every hon. member in this house would agree that it is far better to have a large number of people at the upper end of an age group receiving a pension than to have those people at the lower end of the age group receiving unemployment insurance benefits.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I have long disagreed with some of the provisions in this means test. As the hon. member for New Westminster pointed out, the people who are subject to it are required to dispose of all their assets, their homes and everything accumulated during a lifetime before they become eligible for a pension. I know on a number of occasions I have had to advise senior citizens in my own constituency who had reached the age of 65, who did not have a job

but were not eligible for old age assistance because of the means test, to dispose of their assets for living expenses. I assured them, of course, that after they had reduced those assets to a certain figure they would then become eligible for this payment. It is very difficult to convince elderly people to dispose of their home and spend the last few dollars in their bank account. It is difficult to convince them they should dispose of a farm, for example, and everything they have saved for their old age. In many cases these people on farms have actually retired, but they do have these few assets and the only way in which they can qualify is to dispose of these assets. I feel this is wrong.

If this motion is not going to be accepted in its entirety, Mr. Speaker, and I do believe it is a very reasonable motion because it only reduces the age limit by three years, some very real and important changes should be made in the means test. One other thing that is important to people in this age group is the medical card which is provided by some of the provinces. I certainly urge that some arrangement be made between the federal department of health and welfare and the provincial authorities responsible so that something can be done to make sure these senior citizens get a medical card. Many of the people with whom I have discussed this question are not nearly as interested in the few dollars they may be able to get under old age assistance as they are in the security that comes from having a medical card they can present to a doctor in the event they become ill. Perhaps some consideration, therefore, could be given to this question at the same time.

These are all the remarks I want to make at this time. I hope this matter comes to a vote so that we can at least obtain the consensus of the house, and I can congratulate the hon. member for New Westminster upon raising this question.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lucien Plourde (Quebec West): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to say a few words about this motion.

I am pleased that we are asked to examine a measure whose purpose is to help our senior citizens. However, I would have preferred that the mover provide for pensions at the age of 65 instead of 67. I feel that the government should consider the possibility of introducing before 1967 some legislation in favour of the aged.

First of all, we could find some means of setting up a pension which would be paid to those who have reached a reasonable age, while they are still alive and not too close to the grave, to enable them to spend their last days on earth under decent conditions.