

The Address—Mr. A. Gauthier

Last session, parliament increased pensions to veterans and the government is to be congratulated on its intention to review the War Veterans Allowance Act. The veterans who benefit under the provisions of this act have no other means of livelihood, and all of us have an obligation to those who gave so much.

On the health scene, notable progress has been made in recent years because of federal grants under the national health program. It is less than four years since this program was first announced in this house, but since that time remarkable advances have been made possible in each province.

Federal grants have aided substantially in increasing hospital accommodation by 36,000 beds. Through these grants, more than 3,400 health workers have been trained, 4,300 have been added to provincial and local public health staffs and, in general, health services and facilities in every province are being greatly strengthened.

This year will be memorable in the history of social progress in Canada for what Canadians are now doing, through their governments, for their older fellow citizens. In January of this year two great measures came into effect; the universal federal pension for everyone at 70 and the joint federal-provincial plan for old age assistance for those aged 65 to 69 who require it. I am told that, since this old age pension has been implemented, many of our younger citizens have realized that the principle of old age pensions is sound and now they are taking out annuities with private companies to supplement the government pension they will be receiving at the age of 70.

This new program, which now benefits nearly 700,000 persons, will increase in its expenditures during the years until it exceeds family allowances and becomes Canada's greatest single social program. This government and parliament can well be proud of its achievement in shaping and supporting these measures. In coverage, adequacy of benefit, and absence of means test, as well as in simplicity of administration, Canada's new program for pensions at 70 stands in the forefront of all comparable programs throughout the world today.

I have the honour to move, Mr. Speaker, seconded by the hon. member for Lake St. John (Mr. Gauthier), the following resolution:

That the following address be presented to His Excellency the Governor General of Canada:

To His Excellency the Right Honourable Vincent Massey, C.H., Governor General and Commander-in-Chief of Canada.

May it please Your Excellency:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the House of Commons of Canada, in parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Excellency for the gracious speech which Your Excellency has addressed to both houses of parliament.

(Translation):

Mr. André Gauthier (Lake St. John): Mr. Speaker, it is not without apprehension that I have accepted the redoubtable honour of seconding the address in reply to the speech from the throne. When I look at all my colleagues, most of whom are better qualified than I am, as far as oratorical talent, age and experience are concerned, I have a feeling that I am not worthy of this privilege.

It gives me one more reason for thanking, from the bottom of my heart, the Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent) and his colleagues for having entrusted me with a task which, although it exceeds my ability, I nevertheless consider an enviable honour, especially for a young member who is comparatively a newcomer in this house.

However, although I have some doubts as to my ability to discharge adequately such a duty, I realize that in entrusting me with this task the Prime Minister and his colleagues had undoubtedly in mind the most interesting constituency I represent in the house.

(Text):

Although little time has elapsed since the end of the last session, certain important events have taken place on which I would like to say a few words in this house.

First of all, I want to refer to the regretted, unforeseen and sudden demise of King George VI. Our late lamented sovereign acceded to the throne in difficult circumstances and consented to sacrifice his own personal interests in order to devote his life to the onerous duties of his office. Throughout his life he was a living example of what the true head of a family should be, and he won for himself the admiration and friendship of all his subjects.

The crown received from His late Majesty King George VI nothing but honour. I feel it to be my duty and privilege to join the mover of the address in expressing to Her Majesty the Queen, as well as to the Queen Mother and Queen Mary, on behalf of all members of the House of Commons, our most heartfelt sympathy and deep affection. On the freshly closed grave of our late sovereign, we lay our regrets.

Grievous as it was, this loss has been such as to bring back to mind, and to strengthen, the bonds which unite us to the crown and to the other nations of the commonwealth.