

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

three minutes for a reply on behalf of the government by a minister or his representative. However, I thank the hon. member for his assistance and we shall try to adjust our clocks.

OLD AGE SECURITY—REQUEST THAT MEANS TEST BE ELIMINATED

Mr. Lee Grills (Hastings South): Mr. Speaker, recently I requested that the government give consideration to the elimination of the means test in respect of the supplementary benefits to the old age pension provided for our senior citizens. I have also requested that the misleading information given to recipients of war veterans allowance benefits be corrected. My reason for referring to this subject at this time is that these people now are being asked to forward a further application for supplementary benefits based on an annual means test. I should like to say a "mean" test.

Mr. Knowles: Hear, hear.

Mr. Grills: I would eliminate the "s". Also the unusual increase in the cost of living has had a considerable influence at this time. Over the past week end I have received no less than six inquiries about this particular subject. I have had many—I should say dozens—of requests from people asking for advice as to whether or not for different reasons they should re-apply.

This is something that appears to be fluctuating and those on low income are confused. Many of these people are elderly. They are our senior citizens who are getting on in years, and many of them are easily confused. Surely we should simplify these regulations so they may live easier.

Others who are not as old are discouraged, if not confused, because they are accustomed to working and earning their own living. They are reasonably independent, but they now find that if they earn a few dollars they are no longer entitled to the old age pension supplement.

By this policy the government is destroying any incentive that these people may have to earn extra money, and is destroying their pride and their independence. These people no longer have the satisfaction of personal achievement. The satisfaction of having accomplished something at the end of each day is a source of personal pride to most of us. The government has taken this satisfaction from these people.

The cost of living has soared in the last few years, and particularly during this last year. This has had a tremendous effect on these people. It has a greater effect on individuals who are in their later years, and this will continue even to 1970 when the supplementary old age pension will be paid to individuals then 65 years of age.

Many of these people could make a very worth-while contribution to our productivity. Most of them have made a wonderful contribution to this country in the past and are still willing to do so. Many industries are searching for elderly persons for employment as gardeners or guards. Certainly there is a place for them, but we have denied them this satisfaction.

We have been given a great many figures as to the cost of such a program. Let us consider the cost of administering the present method of giving supplementary payments. I have received hundreds of letters, and have written as many to the department in this respect. Presumably the department has a staff to look after such inquiries. I am sure the revenue department spends a great deal in recovering income tax from these people. I believe that we could do a great deal for these senior citizens at very little cost.

I do not want to be sentimental, but the good book says:

Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

Let me now refer to the misleading information which is given to veterans' widows regarding pension rights. These unfortunate people are led to believe that the supplementary benefits are going to be in addition to their war veterans allowance when actually their war veterans allowance is reduced by the same amount and in some cases in the final analysis the total received is less than prior to applying for the supplementary benefits.

It is my hope that the government will give some consideration in this regard. Many of our veteran pensioners are confused, and many have told me they wish they had never applied for the supplementary old age benefits because they received more before making application. As we approach Remembrance Day, let us remember these people.

• (10:20 p.m.)

Mrs. Margaret Rideout (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member