

Supply—Health and Welfare

expect to have universal medicare or anything like it.

• (5:20 p.m.)

I do not intend to say anything more on that subject because I believe the hon. member for Simcoe East has put forward these arguments in a very cogent manner. It is my hope that the minister will give very serious consideration to them as he goes ahead with his plans.

There are two other aspects of the minister's department about which I should like to speak. First of all, I want to refer briefly to the special committee of the Senate on aging. I do so for two reasons. We have heard a great deal of criticism of the other place recently. Whether or not it is warranted is not for me to say, but I do suggest that a report of the committee indicates the value of that body to Canadians. If there is some difficulty with regard to the other place, it is one that can be rectified by the government provided it wishes to take appropriate action rather than the kind of reform we noted in certain recent appointments to that chamber.

The highly qualified men of the other place should be given the kind of useful objectives to work toward that would be of benefit to all Canadians. I refer particularly to the deliberations of that body on land use and the fact that our ARDA legislation flowed from their report on that subject. Today the ARDA legislation is very much a part of our agricultural and resource policies.

The Senate report on aging contains many recommendations which if implemented would do much toward eliminating the poverty now evident in our country. Indeed, perhaps the implementation of these recommendations would do more than any other step the government could take.

The minister has a department through which tremendous things could be done. It is a department which deals with individual Canadians in difficult circumstances, a department from which will flow great material benefits to everyone in Canada provided the minister is willing to use the facilities available to him to take the kind of action that is required.

I wish to refer specifically to a recommendation on page 19 of the Senate report on aging. It reads as follows:

The committee endorses in principle the institution of an income guarantee program for all persons aged 65 and over and recommends to the federal government that this proposal be given immediate study.

I want to draw the minister's attention to the discussion we have had during this debate about the means test and the Senate committee's recommendation to the effect that the means test should be eliminated and should not apply in considering the needs of the older people of this nation. At page 17 of the report the following is stated:

Any suggestion that these older people, when the \$75 pension is not sufficient, should be expected to depend for supplementation on public assistance after a needs test is utterly unacceptable.

It is certainly unacceptable to me and I believe it is unacceptable to this committee. Again on page 17 of the report the following is stated:

The question is how best to provide such benefits. One possibility would be to increase the Old Age Security Pension by some agreed amount as has been done at intervals in the past.

That is exactly what we proposed during the election campaign and exactly what we have proposed during debates in the house since this session began. This is the logical step to take and I hope the minister will get in touch with the provincial governments in this regard if he finds that necessary. I think funds are available in the federal treasury to provide for the increase if the minister wishes to take that step. If the minister feels it necessary to consult the provincial governments I am sure he will find they will be willing to join in an effort to increase old age pensions to \$100 as we have recommended or to \$105 as recommended by the Senate committee as the very minimum guaranteed income for Canadians 65 and over.

The other matter I wish to raise and direct to the minister's attention relates to allowances for blind and disabled persons. I have been concerned for some time about the fact that individuals receiving allowances of this type are faced with the greatest difficulty anyone in life can face in being unable to work. These people have medical requirements beyond those of the average individual; yet in many cases they are asked to subsist on \$75 per month. What is even worse, the regulations laid down by the Department of National Health and Welfare are interpreted by provincial governments in such a way that many individuals are ineligible for these benefits. This is creating shocking inequities.

I might have taken dozens, even hundreds of cases from my files and read them into the record to show the circumstances of these people who are incapable of working but cannot meet the qualifications for additional