

Health and Welfare

when the portable pension plan was promised, the province of Quebec would not have to make such a fuss to have the plan postponed.

I admit that in my opinion, the hon. members were right when they raised the big question of the constitutional character of the measure with respect to recipients. I think the motion could include the category of people having worked for the federal government and, simply, our old people who are in receipt of an old age pension.

If I suggested that this notice of motion would help setting up a pension plan beneficial to retired employees, the federal government itself could establish a plan and thus set an example for all employers throughout the country.

It is high time the government consulted with the provinces in order to provide our pensioners with the medical care they need. The government gave them a \$10 pension increase, and I must admit, that this is very commendable. The main concern of our old people is, of course, housing and food, but as mentioned by the hon. member for Chapleau, they are mostly obsessed by the fear of illness. They fear that in a month or two, they will be ill and will have to face the cost of medical care.

In my opinion, the government should consider social legislation, providing free medical care to government pensioners, because in a developed society it is quite unlikely that our senior citizens would be starving and roofless, but it is still possible for our old fathers and grandfathers to be deprived of dental care, ophthalmological or medical care, simply because they cannot afford them.

I take the opportunity afforded by this motion to suggest to the government, that when they decide to give something to our old people, they should grant free medical care rather than an amount of \$5 per month which has been mentioned, even if I am also in favour of that suggestion.

[Text]

Miss Pauline Jewett (Northumberland): The hon. member for Labelle (Mr. Girouard) has just said his understanding of the motion is that it would cover retired employees of the federal government, and old age pensioners. I am somewhat confused because the hon. member for Chapleau (Mr. Laprise) in introducing the motion talked mostly about the disabled and the blind. Presumably he thought these would be the primary groups in receipt of free dental, medical and other care. Perhaps this only goes to prove what other hon. members have already argued this afternoon, namely that none of us is sure about who are covered by the phrase "federal government pensioners" in this motion.

[Mr. Girouard.]

However, rather than take the hon. member for Chapleau further to task for his definition, I think I shall congratulate him on the wisdom he has shown in a general way in implying, at any rate, that matters relating to health care are a national responsibility in this country. I have often felt in recent weeks and months that, increasingly, members of this house and, to a still greater extent, members of provincial legislatures, particularly in the province of Quebec, have been taking the view that matters relating to health and welfare are matters solely of interest and concern to the provinces. This has saddened me. I think these are matters which affect all Canadians and with regard to which we should have certain national goals, objectives and standards. Therefore, if the hon. member does not mind, I would congratulate him on bringing forward a motion of this kind which does, it seems to me, clearly imply a national responsibility in this field. It is true his proposals cover only one sector of the whole health field. Nevertheless it is clearly a large sector, as my hon. friend from Carleton has pointed out, if the term "federal government pensioners" is taken in its widest meaning. But, if I may interpret the hon. member's opening remarks, his feeling seems to be that this would only be a beginning, and that later we might move toward a comprehensive or universal scheme of health insurance for the country as a whole emanating from the federal government, undoubtedly in co-operation with the provinces.

Apart from congratulating him on sharing my feeling that this is a national responsibility, and that we must have national objectives and national standards in the field of health, I should like to say, as the hon. member for Hamilton South (Mr. Howe) said—here I am afraid I am being a little critical—that I feel the use of the word "free" is inadvisable. It strikes me that it does seem to smack a little of charity, of a government handing out largesse in a kind of benignant way to the poor, the elderly and so on. I am sure the hon. member did not intend it in that way, but when one phrases a motion as he has done the implication is one of condescension to a large number of citizens of our country and, of course, certainly none of us should feel condescending toward them.

The hon. member for Chapleau implied that the older citizens of Canada would not be in the difficult position they are in today in relation to the enormous costs of health care which practically all of them face, had they not had so much of their incomes taken away from them by taxes during their working years. It is through taxation primarily, of course, that we are able to redistribute