

**The National Pensioners
and
Senior Citizens Federation**

Brief

To The

Government of Canada

December 1980

THE NATIONAL PENSIONERS AND SENIOR CITIZENS FEDERATION

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BRIEF TO THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT ON THE
IMMEDIATE NEEDS OF CANADA'S SENIOR CITIZENS

DECEMBER 1, 1980

FROM: The National Pensioners & Senior Citizens Federation - Canada

TO: The Honourable Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada
The Honourable Alan MacEachen, Minister of Finance
The Honourable Monique Bégin, Minister of Health & Welfare
All Members of the Federal Government and Senate

The National Pensioners & Senior Citizens Federation is a democratic, non-partisan, non-sectarian, and non-racial organization. It was originally formed in 1945 when representatives from senior citizens groups in Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia met in Saskatoon and to date some 280 organizations, representing more than 400,000 pensioners and senior citizens in every province of Canada, have affiliated.

A convention of delegates and visitors representing these affiliates is scheduled each year, and the following brief outlines in general terms the concerns and proposals of those participating in the 1980 Convention held in Lethbridge, Alberta, on September 23-25.

We welcome the opportunity of presenting this brief and respectfully solicit your attention and favourable consideration in support of its recommendations. We also submit that this truly represents the views of the vast majority of Canada's seniors today.

It is acknowledged, of course, that the overall security and living standard of Canada's elderly has improved in recent years and we anticipate continuing progress in these areas with the support of our Government. Specifically, we commend the action of our Government during the past year in providing an increase in available benefits under the G.I.S. program of \$35.00 per month per senior household, and the Federation is pleased to note that appropriate measures have been implemented whereby widowed recipients on Spouse Allowance will continue to receive this benefit until he or she becomes eligible for Old Age Security.

However, it is noted that hundreds of thousands of our senior citizens are still committed to exist on an income that is less than that quoted by various authorities as the absolute minimum required to provide the bare necessities of food, clothing and shelter. This is a fact which is verified and quoted regularly in official Government statistics.

In response to this deplorable situation, the Federation calls upon you, the Government, to initiate the necessary legislation that will provide a guaranteed income adequate and sufficient to meet the needs of health, housing, food, recreation, etc. of our elderly. This income to be automatically increased to meet and reflect the rising living costs over which pensioners have no control. Also, we urge the Government to consider the early implementation of a program that would extend the availability of

this level of income to all persons over the age of 55 who are not members of the normal work force. In our view this would create more permanent employment opportunities for the approximately one million unemployed. Also, in the case of a married senior couple living on a limited income, the death of one normally involves extra expense for the bereaved spouse and, in these circumstances, we recommend that the Old Age Security pension of the deceased be paid to the bereaved spouse for a period of six months.

Canada's seniors are alarmed at the many reports from across the country indicating an erosion of the National Medical Health Care Program, such as imposition of deterrent fees affecting different services; reduction of the number of treatment beds; and even the closing of hospitals; doctors withdrawing from the program and/or insisting an extra billing for their services.

We recognize that these attacks on our medical program will probably destroy it completely if not checked, and we strongly urge you, our Government, to immediately institute whatever action is necessary to ensure that all Canadians will have available to them universal access to needed comprehensive medical-hospital-health care without the barriers of individual charges such as user fees or double billing. With reference to this matter, we were encouraged by several of the recommendations embodied in Justice Bisset Hall's Health Review Report some months ago which largely supported the position of our Federation. However, the fact remains that many Canadians are still being charged extra for user fees and doctor services which we feel should have been stopped before this date.

Our Federation joins with other organizations and individuals in Canada in urging the Canadian Government to nationalize the processing, sale and distribution of oil and use whatever profits accrue for the benefit of the Canadian people. Also, we urge the Federal Government to consider nationalizing all phone utilities in Canada not now publicly owned.

We recommend that a Department of Senior Citizens' Affairs be established with the administrative authority to deal with senior citizens' matters more expeditiously. Delegates expressed concern at reports of long delays in processing applications as required under CPP for widow widower benefits and for individuals in receipt of disability benefits who are required to "changeover" on reaching the age of 65. We urge the authorities responsible to review the regulations applicable in these circumstances.

We also recommend that Canada Pension Plan benefits be adjusted quarterly in line with the Cost of Living similar to the existing policy in regard to Old Age Security.

The delegates were concerned about the many private pensions or annuities purchased some years ago through Insurance or Trust Companies and the fact that these same companies have had the use of this money during the many years of inflated interest income with no consideration or added benefit to the purchaser. In response to this we recommend that the Federal Government call upon these companies to compensate the purchasers of these pensions or annuities from the increased interest income.

With reference to Income Tax, we recommend to the Federal Government that the levels of income presently established before assessing income tax be increased to a level that will assure that senior citizens with a yearly income of less than \$16,000.00 be exempt from paying income tax.

We petition the Postmaster General to supply postal boxes at half price to senior citizens and widows in those areas where individuals are required to pick up their mail at a local post office.

We also urge the Federal Government to make special efforts to permit every eligible person to exercise their franchise even though they may reside in nursing homes, lodges, or hospitals.

The Federation again draws attention to the fact that the introduction of the "Universal Product Code" in supermarkets has tended to result in the elimination of stamped prices on individual items. This absence of prices is confusing to the consumer, especially senior citizens. It also lessens the price awareness of the consumer and makes impossible price comparison of goods even in the same store. We respectfully urge the Government to take action that will ensure stamped prices on all items in stores which now use the Universal Product Code.

We also call upon the Federal Government to do everything possible to control prices particularly on such basic necessities as food, fuel, and housing.

The Federation also recommends that as Nuclear power and all hard energy consumes non-renewable resources and conservation and the correct use of soft renewable energy are of vital importance, the Government of Canada be urged to increase funding for development of renewable energy technology equal to the amount provided by nuclear energy. Also, that the Government of Canada be urged to extend the conservation of clean water by research into:

- (1) a) Improved methods of disposal of domestic, agricultural and industrial wastes.
- b) The long-term effects on human health of pollutants in potable and recreational waters.
- c) The development of effective and economical means of recycling.
- (2) Improved public education on the proper use and conservation of water resources.

Also, we urge the Federal Government when providing grants or loans to Companies or Corporations, that they become insured as part ownership in such Companies or Corporations, as a means of ultimately reclaiming our natural resources for the benefit of the people of Canada.

The delegates in attendance also recorded a unanimous vote "That we go on record as committed to one united Canada, regardless of regional differences".

Our Federation is concerned about the continuing waste of badly needed resources in armaments and urge our Government to pursue the role of peacekeeper for which we have already won considerable credit.

All of which is respectfully submitted.

Chas. McDonald, President
National Pensioners and Senior
Citizens Federation