

Mr. PEPPER. I would like to thank the members of the excellent House General Subcommittee on Labor for giving me this opportunity to testify as to the need to provide greater working opportunities for older workers. I would also like to commend this committee for the excellent job of investigation it has been doing and, I am sure, will continue to do on this matter of vital importance to our Nation.

The problems facing our senior citizens have been receiving increased attention in the past several years, both in the executive and legislative branches of the Federal Government. All of the investigations and studies made so far point to the inescapable conclusion that something must be done to solve the employment problems of older workers, yet very few substantive programs have resulted from these reports and hearings.

We must provide meaningful opportunities for employment to the thousands of workers 45 and over who are well qualified but nevertheless denied jobs which they may desperately need because someone has arbitrarily decided that they are too old.

Although statistics show that as a nation we are growing younger, the absolute number of older persons in the society continues to increase. By 1975, it is estimated that almost 65 million persons will be 45 and over. Today, the worker aged 45 or over comprises 27 percent of all unemployed and 40 percent of the long-term unemployed, and these workers receive more than three-fourths of a billion dollars in unemployment insurance each year.

In 1965, the Secretary of Labor reported to the Congress that approximately half of all private job openings were barred to applicants over 55, a quarter to those over 45; and almost all to those over 65.

At the same time that the older workers are being forced by new technological advances to retire earlier, medical science is discovering ways to enable them to live longer. We are thus faced with the serious prospect of privation and poverty for a great number of this expanding population who will be involuntarily retired in the years ahead.

There are, of course, many areas of study which should be pursued in order to solve this dilemma, but the most important single thing which we can do is to provide older workers with the opportunity to work and to support themselves as they have been doing all their lives.

Not only is employment important to the economic well-being of our older population, it is also important to their mental and physical health. In a recent position statement on the employment of older people the American Medical Association stated:

It is difficult to prove that physical or mental illness can be directly caused by denial of employment opportunities. However, few physicians deny that such a relationship exists.

Many older persons, educated to the pioneer concept of work as a good in itself and leisure time as wasted time, are unable or unwilling to adapt to the creative use of their leisure time. They need to feel that they are in some ways performing a contribution to society.

The bill which I introduced yesterday—"The Older Workers Employment Act of 1967"—attempts to attack this problem facing the older American on several fronts, combining all the best features of several earlier bills I introduced, including H.R. 9207 and H.R. 9893. It not only prohibits arbitrary discrimination against hiring older