

Adjournment Debate

the senior administrators of the minister's department. They built it for the benefit of veterans.

I suggest to the minister that before any move is taken such as is envisaged for the hospital in Victoria, he go out there and talk to the patients in the Victoria veterans hospital.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member's time has expired.

Hon. Daniel J. MacDonald (Minister of Veterans Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I am grateful for this opportunity of clarifying the present position as it affects the Victoria veterans hospital and of removing any fears of uncertainty that may have been caused by recent rumours as to its future.

First let me state clearly that no definite decision has yet been made regarding the future of this hospital. As a matter of policy, however, the government has indicated on many occasions that it hopes to transfer veterans hospitals to provincial or regional jurisdiction provided that satisfactory arrangements for such transfer can be made. I would emphasize that the purpose of these transfers is to ensure that the best possible medical care may continue to be made available to veterans.

On August 16 and 17, Mr. Speaker, officials of the Department of Veterans Affairs met with provincial officials to discuss the terms of a possible transfer agreement affecting the Victoria hospital. Following this meeting, the federal government officials met with the officers of the British Columbia Provincial Command of the Royal Canadian Legion to bring them fully into the picture.

It is an absolute condition of any transfer agreement that a satisfactory number of priority beds must remain available for veteran patients on a continuing basis. I might add that experience of previous transfers has demonstrated that the care of our veterans in the transferred hospitals has never been at a higher level.

It is the intention of the department to continue to explore the possible transfer of this hospital in accordance with determined government policy, but of course only if the required safeguards are fully assured as they relate both to the veterans and to departmental employees. In addition, the officials will keep in touch with veterans' organizations so that they may remain fully conversant with the status of negotiations.

VETERANS AFFAIRS—INQUIRY AS TO INCREASES IN WAR
VETERANS' ALLOWANCES

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, September 10, as recorded in *Hansard* at page 6371, I put this question to the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. MacDonald):

In view of the fact that there are to be increases in old age pensions and family allowances next month, and in view of the minister's statement that the government will treat veterans with fairness, may I ask if the minister is now in a position to indicate precisely what steps the government will take, having in mind in particular veterans who are on the war veterans allowance?

The rest of the exchange is recorded on page 6372 of *Hansard* and it reads as follows:

[Mr. McKinnon.]

HON. DANIEL J. MACDONALD (MINISTER OF VETERANS AFFAIRS): As I indicated to the House last week, the government is in the process of taking the necessary steps, Mr. Speaker.

MR. KNOWLES (WINNIPEG NORTH CENTRE): Is the minister not in a position to state definitely whether it is proposed by order in council to raise the ceiling on permissible income under the War Veterans Allowance Act or whether there will be some other adjustment in the amount being paid to war veterans allowance recipients?

MR. MACDONALD (CARDIGAN): Mr. Speaker, I would prefer not to announce government policy until it is government policy.

It is not surprising that at that point *Hansard* records:

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

Hansard goes on as follows:

MR. KNOWLES (WINNIPEG NORTH CENTRE): Will the minister make an announcement in time so that any improvements for the war veterans can be effective in October, as they will be for the other groups to which I have already referred?

MR. MACDONALD (CARDIGAN): I hope to be able to make an announcement in sufficient time.

Now that we are in the more quiet and relaxed atmosphere of the "late show" period, although there are not many members present to hear what the minister will say, I hope he will give us a firm and definite answer to my question. I say to the minister that I am really hoping for two things. I am hoping he will tell us what the government is going to do in this particular instance when old age pensions are being increased and the pensions of retired civil servants are being increased so that veterans receiving the war veterans allowance will not go through the experience of getting an increase in one hand only to have it taken away from the other.

● (2210)

I said I am hoping to get two things out of the minister. That is the first. I would like to get the assurance that in October the veterans will get the fair treatment the minister talked about. I would like the assurance they will get the full benefit of any increase they receive in old age security and guaranteed income supplement and that in January those who are retired civil servants will also get the full benefit of any increase they receive at that time.

The second thing I would like to get from the minister is perhaps even more important. I make this appeal because I think the minister will want to respond to it. My appeal is that the minister solve this problem once and for all. As he knows, it has happened both ways in the past. There have been times when the government has acted fairly and raised the permissible income ceiling or taken whatever step was necessary so that the veteran receiving the war veterans allowance kept any increase he got. However, there were other times when it has happened in a most unfair manner, when veterans have not been able to keep increases granted to them.

As a matter of fact, this year under this minister, because the increase in disability pensions was delayed so long and because the war veterans allowance increase was made in April, some veterans who got the disability increase in July discovered that the increase which they got in the allowance in April was nullified because of this further increase. I think that happened because of the upset in the government's plan. The government had planned for both of these increases to come at the same