

Pensions

even suggested that widows become eligible at 65. Moreover, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) suggested that pensions be paid immediately, at least to the widows of First World War veterans.

[*English*]

We are acting today beyond the desires and projections of all these people. The government is proposing a formula which should satisfy everyone. We are eliminating the timetable completely and all entitled widows will have become eligible for a pension as of July 1, 1981.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, the government is suggesting a formula which should commend itself to everyone. We are abolishing altogether the phasing-in period. All widows will be eligible for a pension as of July 1, 1981.

[*English*]

Looking back about a year, we should remember that Bill C-40 fulfilled the pledge made in the election campaign a couple of months earlier that, if elected, a Liberal government would move quickly to help those persons in society in the greatest need, and this should be our objective in the months ahead. I do hope that everyone in this House will be convinced of this principle.

Bill C-40 was not exclusively addressed to the needs of widows. There are other benefits for entitled veterans and their dependants. In particular, the legislation gave immediate and future assistance to over 50,000 recipients of war veterans and civilian war allowances under the age of 65.

In total, Bill C-40 represents \$184 million in additional benefits for veterans and their survivors and was the most that could be attained in the financial circumstances at the time of its passage.

Now, just one year later, the government is allocating a further \$41 million so that 23,500 widows and dependants can be eligible for their proportionate pension benefits effective July 1 of this year. We are eliminating completely the phasing-in period.

Hon. members will be interested to know that of the 2,300 widows it was originally estimated would be eligible for benefits by April 1 this year under the current phasing-in formula, applications have actually been received from 1,200, and of these, more than 90 per cent have been processed.

● (1220)

I would point out that the average age of entitled widows is 72 years and the total number of eligible beneficiaries is expected to remain constant over the next five years as new applicants replace those who died. Before the passage of Bill C-40, the Canadian Pension Commission had no way of knowing whether a disability pensioner below the 48 per cent level who had died still had surviving dependants years after the death. As there were no ongoing benefits, there was no need for such records.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to thank all my colleagues in the cabinet, in the House committee and in the House who have made representations and have helped us pass this bill as quickly as possible. I believe that credit should also be given to members on the other side of the House and that my colleagues on this side have made matters easier by making representations in the proper place and at the proper time. I am very grateful for their support.

[*English*]

Now, widows and dependants of all disability pensioners who pass away are informed of their benefits under Bill C-40. The same information will be relayed in respect to the legislation I introduce today. The commission will be working with veterans' organizations and through a media campaign to inform widows of their new benefits. Members on both sides of this House have always been zealous in passing on veterans' information to their constituents and I trust members will use their householders mailings to inform their constituents of this legislation. In these ways, I hope that all widows and dependants will have the information to apply for their rightful pensions.

Honourable members, Mr. Speaker, can be confident that the Canadian Pension Commission is ready to deal quickly with the applications flowing from the legislation. The processing period will be relatively short as, unlike claims for disability pensions, there is no need for the comprehensive gathering of supporting medical and military evidence. I am confident, Mr. Speaker, that this legislation will have the support of all parties. It is further proof of this nation's resolve that veterans and their survivors will continue to receive the just and generous treatment they deserve.

Bill C-40 was ground-breaking legislation. The aging veterans' program I announced last November is another pioneering program designed to bring independence and dignity to the most needy of our disability pensioners. Bill C-82 is added evidence that this government and this Parliament continue to recognize and honour the debt owed to those who fought for Canada and who left us a heritage, the freedom and liberties we enjoy—which make this country Canada so great.

Mr. Joe Reid (St. Catharines): Mr. Speaker, for the second time this week I have the honour and privilege of rising on behalf of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition to respond to the introduction of a bill which this time is not only to the benefit of veterans, but particularly to the benefit and interest of widows and dependants of veterans. Of interest here is the fact that Bill C-82 introduces amendments to an act passed just one year ago yesterday. If we could maintain that kind of review and update in this House with respect to all legislation, then this would be an efficient Parliament indeed and it would gain the respect of Canadians across the land.

Of course, it should come as no surprise that we on this side endorse the recommendations proposed in Bill C-82. We have recommended them for some time, and the Conservative party endorses the proposals with respect to both amendments to the