

Veterans Affairs

Mr. Fred King (Okanagan-Similkameen): Mr. Speaker, in September 1981, Mr. A. D. McCracken was commissioned to examine the administrative and adjudicative procedures of the pension process. Mr. McCracken was asked to report to the Minister on possible changes in the pension system to allow a shorter period between the time veterans first apply for disability pension benefits and the disposition of their claims.

Mr. McCracken reported that from mid-1979 to mid-1981 the rate of decisions fell significantly and, as a result, the backlog of applications awaiting adjudication had risen by June 30, 1981 to 4,395 from some 2,800 in March, 1979. Of this total, over 16 per cent had been on hand for more than 12 months. Apart from these backlogs in the pension system, Mr. McCracken also reported that there were almost 3,000 cases with district pension advocates throughout the country, of which 37 per cent had been on hand for six months or more. That was 700 more than was normally the case.

As the Hon. Member opposite indicated, we are pleased to note that there has been significant change for the better. Recently the Minister reported that very substantial progress was made with respect not only to the question of dealing with the backlog of the Canadian Pension Commission but also dealing with the processing time. He noted that where formerly the process was taking around 334 days or nearly a year, it was reduced to some 79 days.

I want to contrast the optimistic report which gives all of us satisfaction with a letter I received yesterday from a constituent, Mr. G. Lars Thompson of Penticton. The letter revealed frustration and resentment as a result of a series of events that had affected him in his relationship with the Canadian Pension Commission. He began his letter by writing:

I am asking for assistance in obtaining case histories of the experience of veterans with the Canadian Pension Commission. As you are aware it can take years for the Canadian Pension Commission to process a claim that could have been completed in a matter of days. The ridiculously long time that it can take to process a veteran's claim would indicate that the Commission wants the veteran to become discouraged or die before a pension award is made.

I do not believe that is the case, but the letter indicated a frustration in dealing with what veterans believe to be a cold, unfeeling bureaucracy. It revealed a resentment which develops in one who feels that he is being denied a benefit to which he is entitled.

The Hon. Member for Red Deer (Mr. Towers) in mentioning the provision of benefit of doubt that would affect those situations in which veterans cannot provide all specific proof but can produce evidence to substantiate the circumstances they present in their plea for help. Perhaps the frustration and resentment comes about because it appears that where doubt exists there is very little benefit extended to the claimant.

I had wished to bring a matter to the attention of the House concerning prisoners of war and the failure to settle accounts with certain prisoners of war who were held in Stalag III in Germany, however I do not have the time at my disposal today and I will leave it for another day. I also see that my friend

across the way is anxious to get the floor, so I will terminate my remarks and give the floor to him.

Mr. Jack Burghardt (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Communications): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Hon. Member for Okanagan-Similkameen (Mr. King) for allowing me perhaps a minute or a minute and a half to speak very briefly on the motion of the Hon. Member for Red Deer (Mr. Towers).

The report entitled "They Served, We Care" prepared by the Committee in the other place has been justly praised in many quarters. The Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Campbell) has also added his praise of this report. It reflects a thorough and responsible look at the broad range of veterans' issues. As we know, it contained seven recommendations. I should point out that some of them no longer have relevance as they were answered in the normal course of time.

● (1720)

It would seem that the Hon. Member for Red Deer (Mr. Towers) is really concerned about the last recommendation concerning the Woods report. We do know that these particular issues and subjects have been argued, analysed, discussed and dissected time and again.

Mr. Blaikie: Then let's have some action.

Mr. Burghardt: There has been action, as many veterans and veterans' organizations throughout the country know. It is quite evident to any member of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs when representatives of the Veterans' organizations appear before the committee. In correspondence individual Members receive from veterans' groups, we see that a great deal of action has been taken.

I realize my time is up. I would like to have been able to further enunciate the actions that have been taken and certainly the broad policies which this current Minister in particular has undertaken.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin): Order, please. Pursuant to Standing Order 24(2), it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin): Before proposing the question on the motion for second reading and reference of Bill C-405, An Act to amend the Unemployment Insurance Act, 1971, (Benefits to adopting parent), the Chair ought to enter a caveat as to the procedural acceptability of this Bill.

When a private members' Bill provides for an enlargement of the class of possible claimants or for an increase in the benefits payable under the Act, the charge on the Consolidated