

of war later in the war. This compensation which will be of benefit to former prisoners of war and their families will be indexed to keep pace with changes in the consumer price index.

In making this announcement, I must again pay special tribute to the lead taken by the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs which, in its usual non-partisan manner, heard evidence and made the report on which the government's decision is based.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. William Knowles (Norfolk-Haldimand): Mr. Speaker, I suppose I should first say that all good things come to those who wait. We have certainly waited for some time for this statement by the minister. Let me say at the outset that we appreciate the advance notice given by the minister of the contents of his statement, as well as the statement itself which reached my office this morning. That advance notice came in the form of very careful discussions with the minister in his office and critics from the opposition parties in this House. I think this ability of the minister to speak freely with us indicates the mutual understanding and respect we have for one another, as well as the non-partisan nature of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

The one sentence or phrase from the statement, that "many veterans have been eagerly waiting for an announcement" is an understatement of considerable magnitude. The minister might be considered a conservative, with a small "c", in putting it that way. The constant prodding by members of the opposition parties, the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall), the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) and, if I may not be too immodest, myself has been aimed at the minister to bring forth a statement or the legislation.

The prodding has not been aimed so much at the minister, because we understand his concern about this problem, but more especially at his cabinet colleagues who the minister had a great deal of difficulty convincing as to the necessity of bringing in something for these prisoners of war. I make one notable exception, his colleague, the Minister of National Revenue (Mr. Cullen), who was a member of the committee on veterans affairs and was instrumental in bringing about some consensus which enabled the committee to bring in the report on which this statement is based.

We in the opposition will certainly expedite the passage of the bill which will implement the proposals in this statement. In fact, I think we are willing to do that in a matter of hours when the legislation is brought forward.

An hon. Member: Minutes.

Mr. Knowles (Norfolk-Haldimand): I have discussed this matter with some of my colleagues on this side and I am almost certain I can give this assurance to the minister. I think we are right in asking how soon the legislation will be prepared and introduced to the House. The veterans referred to in the statement are in advancing years, and because of that the grim reaper is taking his toll year by year—as a matter of fact, month by month—with increas-

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ing frequency. While we are setting aside "X" millions of dollars to finance this program, I think it will be a decreasing amount year by year as these men pass on to their reward. This is something that should be kept in mind when we talk about the number of dollars the program is going to cost the government.

I do not wish to take too long, but I think I should point out that the report on which this statement is based had three main proposals: an adjustment to pensions received by Hong Kong veterans, compensation to prisoners of war other than Hong Kong veterans, and an adjustment to widows' pensions whose veteran spouses received less than 48 per cent.

It is obvious from the statement that it takes into consideration compensation to prisoners of war but omits widows' pensions. We have agreed to pass the bill, but I do not think we need gag ourselves by not asking the minister at some time down the line to keep this in mind. The Minister of National Revenue indicated that they had flagged this particular recommendation of the report, which indicates to me that they had it in mind and I sincerely hope that is the case. The minister explained earlier the reasons for this omission. We accept those and will not press the point now. When another budget comes down and we are again reviewing government spending, I give the minister notice that we will be asking more questions about this matter.

Again I say to the minister, through you, Mr. Speaker, that we welcome this statement and will do everything in our power to expedite passage of the legislation which we hope will come in at the earliest possible moment.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, as my first word I should like to thank the minister for the tribute he paid in his statement today to the members of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. It may be that some of us have been doing the prodding in public about this matter, most of us being on this side of the House, but I know I speak for every member on the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs when I say that we have been unanimous in our anxiety to get this legislation, and we are all delighted the minister has finally got cabinet approval and has been able to indicate that the legislation will be brought in.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Coming as I do from the city of Winnipeg, I know a good many Canadian veterans who were at Hong Kong, and a good many who were at Dieppe as well as in other prison camps in Europe. That experience enables me to confirm that those who suffered the experience of being prisoners of war in Hong Kong, after Dieppe and at other prison camps, went through something for which they should have been compensated long, long ago. It is too bad we have had to wait this long, but now that the legislation has been announced we welcome it.

I join with my namesake who spoke just now in saying that once this bill is brought in the minister will be surprised at how little time it will take to get through. I hope it has an effective date with some retroactivity to cover all the time that these veterans have had to wait. In