

*Government Orders*

came home, but who continue to struggle with the disabilities, the memories of the war, and the companions they lost. We bear a great responsibility and concern as well for the spouses, widows and dependents of these veterans.

As I took the time to examine this bill with the various veterans associations, such as the Royal Canadian Legion and the National Council of Veterans Associations, which includes among others the War Amputations of Canada, I came to the conclusion that there were many changes that were needed in this legislation.

It is the bill's intention to pay interest on funds held in trust accounts for veterans and administered by the department. I regret that it took so long to see this come about. The Auditor General recommended in his report that Parliament for the year ending 1986 said that interest should be paid on such accounts. This initiative, of course, is one ray of hope in a bill which in many other cases is in need of further improvement.

There are several aspects of this bill which cause concern to the veterans organizations and to myself. I would like to discuss for a moment those concerns. Many veterans' issues have yet to be addressed by the government, issues which cannot wait for resolution much longer. Veterans, of course, make up a small segment of our population and they may not be considered to be a high priority by many Canadians. In view of the sacrifices made by these men and women, this is an attitude which we must fight every step of the way. We owe our freedom and our democracy to these outstanding Canadians, and the concerns and the needs of them and of their dependents must be addressed on an ongoing basis. Veterans are fortunate to have such organizations as the Royal Canadian Legion and the National Council of Veterans Associations to talk to the Department of Veterans Affairs and other areas of government on their behalf.

Of great concern to veterans and their associations is the effect of the clawback. The passage of Bill C-28 by the other place means that Canadian veterans will be forced to subsidize the deficit which this government has failed to reduce effectively.

Also, there are many veterans who do not require chronic care in a hospital setting, but who do need a support system at home. Therefore, the department

offers The veterans Independence Program. However, some veterans, such as those who did not serve outside of Canada, are not eligible for certain benefits under the program. I feel this discrimination between veterans is unfair and must be corrected to ensure that all veterans receive equal treatment.

I believe that the passage of this bill without the positive changes in the following areas would be a terrible development on our system of veterans benefits. I just want to quote some of the sections.

Clause 4, paragraph 14(3)(b) states that "any of the commission's duties" should be changed to specify "non-adjudicative duties". This would leave no doubt that while duties may be delegated, the power of adjudication cannot be delegated.

There are many clauses which I feel need correction and as we go through the clause-by-clause examination, I will speak to them. There are some apparent drafting errors as well that must be corrected. One is that appeals to entitlement boards, amending subsection 81(1) of the Pension Act in clause 28 to restore the words "or whose award has been cancelled or reduced". These words are necessary to allow a pensioner to appeal a decision to cancel or reduce an award on grounds other than a change on the basis of entitlement, in particular, when a pension is stopped under new subsection 106(22).

Second, in dealing with the stoppage of pensions for the refusal to be medically examined, the new subsection 106.22 of the Pension Act in clause 31 of the bill should be changed by replacing the word "minister" with "commission". This would leave in place the avenues of appeal which now exist and would ensure that adjudication is performed by the independent commission, rather than by the minister.

• (1600 )

Of understandable concern to veterans organizations is the apparent change of mood on the part of government with regard to benefits. The implementation of the clawback, as I stated earlier, the charges for board and lodging, the restrictive policy in regard to hearing loss assessment, the placing of restrictions on the number of days a year that treatment allowance for pensionable disability can be paid and the restrictions regarding the effective dates of retroactive payment of treatment benefits are just a few concerns.