

Veterans Affairs Committee Report

Another matter with which I should like to deal concerns pensioners involved in damage claims. The *Legion* magazine says it more colloquially but quite succinctly with the following phrase "sorry, ma'am, you can't have both the pension and the insurance payment". The widow who has lost a pensioned husband in an automobile accident would be shocked, says the *Legion*. I hope this widow would have the presence of mind to blurt out "why not?". Surely, a pension is a matter of right. The Woods committee agrees and says, further, that the pension should be paid regardless of any other payments which may be made to the pensioner or his widow from other sources.

The next point on which I should like to speak is the stabilization of pensions. This is an area where I have some first hand knowledge. The reduction of the percentage of pensionable disability has often had the effect of cutting out a pension which would be paid to a veterans' widow. This must happen in many cases. The sad truth is that a veteran has had little enough opportunity to build up an estate and when he has reached a certain degree of pensionable disability, then on his death his wife receives a pension whether or not his death is attributable to wartime disability. Consider the case of a veteran who has received a percentage of disability allowance necessary for his widow to receive a pension. Suppose he has been receiving this disability pension for a period in excess of five years. Surely, after this length of time he would come to rely upon the supposition that his widow would continue to receive her income, and take this into account when planning his estate. Can hon. members imagine his disgust, and the concern he feels for his wife's position, when, after this long period of time his case is reviewed and he is told he is no longer in the same high category and that the amount of his pension is to be reduced, with the result that his wife will not receive a pension?

• (3:50 p.m.)

I agree that veterans receiving disability pensions should be subject to a series of medical examinations to determine whether or not the percentage of pensionable disability should be reassessed, but surely after a period of three, four or five years—whatever the minister and his colleagues in their wisdom may decide—the percentage of pensionable disability should not be subject to reduction. In effect I am agreeing with the Woods Committee recommendation that a stabilization

[Mr. Cullen.]

policy should be established for the guidance of the veteran.

Unfortunately, time does not permit me to put all my views on the Woods Committee report before the house. I have tried in the short period to highlight some of the areas which I feel need attention. We on the government side do not have the leeway available to the opposition because we have the obligation to govern, with all the responsibility which this entails. In this case it means we are responsible for finding taxpayers' dollars with which to meet the recommendations. If an hon. member on the government side suggests that maybe, just maybe, we cannot afford it—that is to say, the taxpayers cannot afford it—

Mr. Nesbitt: Every year, \$155 million for the C.B.C.

An hon. Member: Quiet.

Mr. Nesbitt: I will not be quiet. He is using up the time so that I shall not get a chance to speak.

Mr. Cullen: It is gratifying that the hon. member is listening to my address.

Mr. Nesbitt: Seventy-five million dollars to Ford.

Mr. Cullen: To suggest that perhaps the taxpayers cannot afford it is almost heresy in the eyes of the opposition. The veteran has been prepared to give his life. How can we talk about not being able to afford it?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Cullen: Maybe if the hon. member listens he will learn something.

Mr. Nesbitt: I have active knowledge of what the hon. member is talking about.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Can we have order in the house?

Mr. Cullen: We have an obligation to the taxpayer, certainly, but I say we have a still greater responsibility to the veteran not to hold out false hopes, not to have him believe that every one of these recommendations will be accepted, not to have him feel that every request made by the Legion or by other veteran's associations is going to be met. I believe it is incumbent upon the government to do all it can to assist veterans and their dependants within reason, and, where possible, I believe the government has an obligation to extend its facilities or to increase the