

*Veterans Affairs*

implementation of the many recommendations of the Woods report. This report is nearly 15 years old and I would be surprised if many anomalies had not been unearthed during that period of time. Rather, I want to discuss the specific issues the Senate Committee wants to put under the microscope.

First, there is the question of the apparent inequity to a divorced spouse who, under existing legislation, has no entitlement to benefits under the Pension Act and the War Veterans Allowance Act. I ask Hon. Members, where is the need for a special committee to probe into this matter? The circumstances are well known. Either you believe there is inequity or you do not. It is not as if this were a new issue. It has been around for years and the facts have not changed. Veterans receive benefits as compensation for their individual service in a theatre of war. They are granted to male and female veterans alike. They are not awarded to families because families do not serve in a theatre of war. Widows can receive survivors' benefits because they had been, until the veteran's death, the spouse of an entitled veteran.

But in the case of a divorce, the veteran no longer has a spouse. The benefits earned by a veteran are not transferable, not to his parents, nor to an ex-spouse. Opponents of this principle point to the Canada Pension Plan where the benefits are divided in half at the time of divorce. But, Mr. Speaker, Canada Pension Plan benefits are earned through financial contributions over the years. War Veterans Allowances and disability pensions are not awarded in return for financial payments that otherwise might have been part of the household income. They are given in recognition of individual service in war time and, of course, in the case of disability pensions, as recompense for individual injury.

No amount of study is going to change these facts. Arguments have been made that War Veterans Allowances should be regarded as is the Canada Pension Plan and the Guaranteed Income Supplement. Such arguments have been rejected. So where is the need for further study? Take the case of a War Veterans Allowance recipient who is receiving the married rate. If this veteran is divorced, only the single rate is paid. Do we need a committee to decide if it is fair for that veteran to pay half the single rate allowance to an ex-spouse? I, for one, do not think so.

Now, let us look at the next matter officials would be called upon to examine. I want to quote verbatim from the conclusions in the Senate report. It reads:

Under the Prisoner of War Compensation Act, veterans are paid disability pensions of from 10-20 per cent based on the length of time they were incarcerated. The Hong Kong veterans, however, have been entitled to a disability pension of 50 per cent because of the extreme severity of their long confinement. Other groups of veterans, such as the Dieppe veterans, were also held for long periods of time under abnormally harsh conditions but are entitled to a pension of no more than 20 per cent. Is it just to compensate those who were prisoners of war for over two and one-half years at a disability rate that is only twice the compensation offered those who were incarcerated for just three months?

• (1710)

There, concisely and accurately, is the issue. If the Senate Committee could not come to a definite conclusion, why does it expect another committee to do so? What else is there to investigate? That Committee has investigated it all. Any such investigation would centre on the demands by the Dieppe Veterans and Prisoners of War Association for larger pensions for its members. That Association is being well served by its President, Mr. Georges Giguere. Mr. Giguere has appeared before committees in both Houses and has forcefully stated his case. He has met with the Minister. I would suggest that no person could have been more diligent in presenting the case of Dieppe prisoners of war.

We can argue whether or not successive Governments have reacted properly to those presentations, but we cannot argue that Dieppe POWs have not been heard. We sometimes forget that Canada is one of very few countries in the world which has any prisoner of war compensation at all. We have every reason to be proud of our legislation. Surely our record shows that prisoner of war associations have been given sympathetic hearings over the years.

I know the Minister regularly reviews the claims of Dieppe prisoners of war and is in possession of any facts that would be brought before a committee. In conclusion, these issues have been exhaustively studied. They have been studied and difficult decisions have been made. There is no reason to slough off responsibility on another committee. Although I have every sympathy with the issue raised and I congratulate the Hon. Member for keeping issues pertaining to veterans and their families before the House of Commons, I do not see any need for the motion to consider further the advisability of implementing recommendation No. 7 since it has already been considered.

**Mr. Towers:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Would the Hon. Member for Etobicoke-Lakeshore (Mr. Robinson) accept a question?

**Mr. Robinson (Etobicoke-Lakeshore):** I will accept a question unless my time is up.

**Mr. Towers:** In view of the canned speech the Hon. Member has just presented, would he agree that the Government will take action immediately if it will not set up the committee as recommended by the Senate Committee? It is fine and dandy with me if he agrees that the Government will take some action immediately and not wait a year or a year and a half as has been suggested. Certainly a committee could meet and report back in two or three months. This does not necessarily mean that it has to go on so long. Will the Hon. Member guarantee that the Government will take some action on this matter, not just leave it sitting, as it has been for the past several years?

**Mr. Robinson (Etobicoke-Lakeshore):** I think the Hon. Member for Red Deer (Mr. Towers) asked a very good question which he should put before the Minister when he is in the House during Question Period.