

the veteran to whom she was married was in receipt of a pension of less than 48 per cent. Provision should be made for a pro rata pension for widows of veterans receiving a pension of 48 per cent or less.

● (9:00 p.m.)

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): As our report recommended.

Mr. MacLean: I am fully aware of that. I think the government should have accepted that recommendation. I wish to deal briefly with what is perhaps an area of omission. I am rather surprised that the minister did not include an amendment to the schedule which increases across the board the rates of disability pension. He no doubt has a perfectly good reason. I am not clear about the intention of the government in that regard. Why was it omitted from this bill? I am only guessing, but I presume an omnibus bill will be introduced which will again amend this act and the War Veterans Allowance Act which will establish schedules of payments. If that is not done, perhaps it will be by way of a bill granting supply. In any event, it is regrettable that these increases are not now established and that they have not been made retroactive to at least some degree.

There are a number of other matters I would like to speak about regarding increases to veterans disability pensions, war veterans allowance and their application to certain situations. However, although Your Honour has been very lenient, technically I would perhaps be out of order in discussing them at this time, because this bill does not grant across the board increases in rates. Hopefully, there will be another opportunity when legislation will be introduced to increase the rates announced by the minister. On that occasion there will be an opportunity to discuss the rates of disability pensions and war veterans allowances and their application to the veterans of this country.

Mr. D. Gordon Blair (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, we are considering one of the most important statutes ever enacted by this Parliament, the Pension Act. I speak of this with feeling because my father died of his war wounds when I was very young. I was raised in a home where for many years the only income was the war veterans pension. I am sure hon. members know that this legislation is, and has been, important for the support of a great number of people in Canada. The existence of this legislation in the various forms it has taken over the years has provided hope and opportunity that many thousands of people otherwise would not have had.

I have approached this discussion with some hesitancy. I feel impelled to disclose the reason for this. At the time the Woods committee was in existence, I was occasionally called upon to offer it professional advice. I hope it will not be considered that my connection several years ago with the work of this committee disentitles me to speak at this time. What we have before us this evening is the product of the work of many hands. When the Woods committee was appointed in 1965, it was expected by

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some people who were not aware of the complexities of pension legislation that it would be able to make simple recommendations that might quickly be enacted into law. This obviously was not possible.

The thorough investigation conducted by the Woods committee is fully evidenced by its excellent and long report. It indicates the degree of complexities which have developed over the many years of the history of the Pension Act. I wish to express on my behalf and, I am sure, on behalf of all hon. members the debt of this nation to a distinguished former naval officer and jurist, the Honourable Mr. Justice Mervyn Woods who headed this committee with such distinction. His committee has made an imperishable contribution to the public affairs of Canada.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Blair: The government is entitled to great credit for the manner in which it dealt with the recommendations of the Woods Committee. The presentation of the initial governmental proposals in the form of a white paper was commendable because it enabled these proposals to be exposed to the full rigour of a searching inquiry by a parliamentary committee. I cannot speak too highly of the work of that committee. It has justified to a major degree the committee system and has made a very great contribution to the development of the pension legislation of this country.

I do not intend to detain the House very long. My comments will be directed to three aspects of the legislation as it is now placed before us, aspects in which the government proposal varies from the report of the committee. I offer the observation that after the thorough study of the legislation by the committee and the important dialogue between representatives of various organizations and the committee, it is indeed a serious matter to see departures from its recommendations where they deal with important matters.

The first aspect on which I wish to comment is the proposal with regard to multiple disabilities. In effect, the government has proposed that the special allowance for disabilities be limited to \$2,400 per annum. After very careful study of the matter, the committee recommended that it should be \$3,500. I am sure that no one in this chamber feels the need is not great or that the need is not admitted. The question must, surely, be one of cost—the fiscal consequences of this new and enlightened proposal. I hope there will be in the committee ingenious and informed parliamentarians who will find ways of reopening this matter for discussion.

My second point is in connection with the procedure known as leave to review. At the present time, when decisions are made by the Pension Commission which are adverse to an applicant, the applicant has the option to make application for leave to review when new evidence or circumstance develop. The committee recommended that this procedure be continued. However, the proposal of the bill is at variance with this recommendation. I suggest that it may impose quite severe complications upon