

Old Age and Veterans' Pensions

provide additional relief and support to these pensioners whose disability is exceptional in degree or scope, the government proposed to introduce an exceptional incapacity allowance of not less than \$400 and up to \$1200 per annum.

This proposal was made after exhaustive study of the whole question of disability compensation, and it is designed to assist all categories of 100 per cent disability pensioners ranging from multiple amputees to polio victims. In his statement to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs on December 4, 1969, the minister outlined in detail the principles which will govern the awarding of exceptional incapacity allowances. They are ten in number and clearly indicate that this important new measure will be sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of this special category of pensioner.

With respect to pension adjudication, it has now been generally accepted that one of the key recommendations of the Woods committee report is the establishment of an independent appellate body with the power of final interpretation of the Pension Act and with final power of adjudication in all pension matters. I am pleased that the government has accepted the principle of this recommendation and proposes to restructure our pension system to include a forum for pension appeals.

The proposed new pension structure really provides for three independent levels of adjudication and divorces the purely administrative function from the judicial function as much as possible. Furthermore, it ensures that at no time will the pension applicant's case be considered by persons who have previously adjudicated at any stage. The new structure thereby meets one of the major criticisms of the current pension adjudication system. There are, of course, other methods of effecting the introduction of an appellate system in the field of pension adjudication, and much evidence has been presented to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs by veterans organizations in this regard.

I am pleased that the minister has made it quite clear that these other alternatives will be given full consideration and that the white paper is not an immutable government position. Whatever structure finally evolves, I am confident that it will provide the best solution to the problems relating to pension adjudication in Canada.

There are many other important benefits in the white paper upon which I do not have

time to comment tonight, but I am confident that when all the white paper proposals are implemented, Canada will have one of the most generous and equitable war disability pension schemes in the world.

It is with a dedicated staff of over 10,000 and an estimated budget this year of nearly half a billion dollars that the Department of Veterans Affairs carries out the obligations set out in the Veterans' Charter. I have not even touched upon the many important facets of their work which contribute tremendously to the quality of life of Canada's veterans. The hon. member for Fort William referred to the Veterans Land Act and to the very effective treatment services program which is carried out in our nine veterans hospitals; and there is a new hospital being built at Ste. Anne de Bellevue, near Montreal, to be completed later this year.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard): Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member, but his time has expired.

Hon. W. G. Dinsdale (Brandon-Souris): Mr. Speaker, the resolution we are debating is quite specific, clearcut and restrictive in its application. This being so, I indicate at the outset of my remarks that I strongly support the resolution. Because it is worded in such precise terms it should be quite easy for the members of the House generally to lend their support to it.

Mr. Woolliams: Even the Grits.

Mr. Dinsdale: Yes, even the Liberals, as my friend the hon. member for Calgary North (Mr. Woolliams) indicates. It should be quite easy for all members of the House to support the resolution. It asks the government to give consideration to an immediate and substantial increase in the basic amount of the old age security pension and in veterans pensions and allowances. This focuses on the area of greatest need in our social security programs as they apply in the first instance to our senior citizens and then to the veterans of Canada. It also contains the important proviso that further steps be taken to improve the quality of life of all our older and retired people. The resolution is couched in such general language that I do not think it presents any formidable barrier for hon. members on all sides of the House to support it.

• (8:10 p.m.)

During the course of debate thus far, those who have spoken on behalf of the government have tended to resort to the red-herring