

War Veterans Allowance Act

the present time, the Department uses the current calendar year to determine income while the Department of National Health and Welfare refers to the income reported by the taxpayer for the previous year. By using the same method as Health and Welfare Canada, it is estimated that \$2.5 million more will be paid out to needy veterans. It should also be noted that the formula used to determine the guaranteed income supplement is not as involved as the one used by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Mr. Speaker, only allowance recipients who are eligible both for the old age security pension and for the guaranteed income supplement will file a statement of income with Health and Welfare Canada in 1986. Those who are under 65 years of age will continue to provide all income-related information to the DVA. In order to bring both programs into harmony, the forms used in connection with the War Veterans Allowances Program will be simplified to meet GIS standards. All War Veterans Allowance recipients, whatever their age, will enjoy the benefits of the new income filing methods.

• (1530)

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, War Veterans Allowances recipients will get the best of both worlds. They will continue to have their casual earnings and interest income exempted, something other GIS recipients are not entitled to.

To implement these changes will cost some \$3 million in subsidies and contributions, in addition to \$3.5 million in operating costs. These expenses are a careful use of public funds, because they will result in major savings in the forthcoming years. We expect for instance that when the War Veterans' programs, Civilian War Allowances programs, GIS and OAS programs have been brought into harmony, by 1988-89, the administration of all these programs will require 157 fewer person-years.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, these changes will allow the Department of Veterans Affairs to re-direct its funds, in order to meet better the increasing needs of veterans for health and social services.

I would like to say to the House that there are many more amendments of a housekeeping nature. When one refers to Bill C-39, one can realize that an effort has been made to improve the entire administrative mechanism and to ensure the satisfactory operation of the services made available to veterans.

I should also add that the Department of Veterans Affairs, once some savings are made, will be ready to extend the program to aging veterans. It is perhaps the most important aim, the priority of the Department and its minister at this time. Indeed, as the expenditures related to the administration of allowances are reduced, thanks to administrative and technological changes, we will be in a position to earmark more resources to assist ageing veterans to live with dignity and self-dependency.

The Hon. Members will remember that an innovative program was created in April 1981 under the principle that aging individuals wish to remain as independent as possible as long as possible. Every indication is to the effect that most veterans would rather receive some assistance which would allow them to live at home rather than in a hospital or a nursing home.

The assistance provided under the program can be very simple or very complicated. The problems vary as much as the services made available by the Department. Some veterans need the care of a nurse or a physiotherapist at home. Others will have to be treated at a clinic or will merely need to have snow removed at their door in the winter or the grass cut in the summer. In some cases the handicapped may need a wheelchair ramp.

The whole range of services to assist aging veterans is, and will be in the years to come, a continuing priority for the authorities of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Over 2,000 veterans have already welcomed enthusiastically the benefits of this program. I need only mention the enthusiastic and determined support of all veterans' associations. The only cloud, as it were, is that the program does not reach enough veterans.

Today I can announce, on behalf of my colleague, the Minister of Veterans Affairs, that many veterans will become eligible for the benefits provided under the Aging Veterans Program over the next five years. The program's range will be broadened in four stages. First of all, starting October 1, 1984, it will be available to veterans of 65 or over, receiving a disability pension and a veterans allowance. It will also be offered to veterans over 75 who are receiving an allowance, but not a pension.

Second, starting January 1, 1986, all other beneficiaries under this program between the ages of 65 and 74 will be eligible.

Third, after January 1, 1983, applications will be accepted from veterans who are 65 or over and receiving a disability pension but not receiving assistance from Veterans Affairs because of the benefits provided under the Old Age Security Act.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, on January 1, 1988, the program will provide assistance for veterans of 65 and over, who are not receiving a disability pension but who did service in a real war theatre and can not receive assistance from Veterans Affairs because of the Old Age Security Act.

Mr. Speaker, the program will be offered to a greater number of veterans. It will also offer a wider range of services. It will provide transportation services for eligible veterans. This new benefit is very important to people who would otherwise be confined to their homes. The program will provide up to \$600 annually to defray transportation expenses of veterans who must leave their homes occasionally to go shopping or to carry out any of the transactions that are