

might have been indulging in semantics, the phrase "something must have existed" was a dangerous one. Well, we did get that changed to a wording which now states that the presumption of physical fitness on enlistment cannot be rebutted quite that easily but can still be rebutted—and I now quote the bill as it presently reads—by medical evidence that establishes beyond a reasonable doubt that the disability or disabling condition existed prior to enlistment. I think that is a little better than the previous wording "must have existed". However, it still leaves an opening which in some cases may be resolved against the veteran. I hope this will not happen but I think we would be misleading the veterans of Canada if we gave all those who have been disappointed in the past the impression that their cases will now be resolved more favourably. Nevertheless, I hope it will turn out that by improving the benefit of doubt clause we have made the position better for our veterans.

● (3:30 p.m.)

Like the hon. member for Norfolk-Haldimand I feel we did not go far enough in the clause having to do with the exceptional incapacity allowance when we improved the wording about those who are provided with a prosthesis. I think the case that is still being made to us by the War Amputations of Canada, namely that such an allowance should not be affected by whether or not one is fitted with a prosthesis, is a good case. I am sorry that in the committee we were unable to go all the way. Again, it is one of the good things about committee treatment of a bill of this kind that we did get an improvement. I dare to hope that the sympathy and concern of the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Canadian Pension Commission will be such that if it should turn out in a year or two that that clause needs to be amended and improved the government will bring in such a proposal.

I want to say again, as I have said on previous occasions, how much I regret the unwillingness of the government to go along with the committee's support for recommendation 106 in the Woods report. That recommendation had to do with the position of widows of veterans where the veteran at his death had a pension of less than 48 per cent. As the law stands, there is no pension as of right for such widows. The Woods committee recommended that in such cases there be a proportionate pension as a matter of right. The Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, when dealing with the Woods report and the white paper, recommended that the Woods report recommendation be implemented. Even so, the government did not include it in the bill. In the committee when we were studying this bill we tried again and were unable to get majority support at that time as we had previously, and so it is not in the bill. I believe this is unfortunate.

Speaking of widows, another improvement we made to the bill in the standing committee had to do with a group known as widowed mothers. They are part of the group known as dependant parents. We discovered that a provision had found its way into the bill—I had a word in my mind which I think perhaps I should not use—that would permit the dependant parents' pension to be taken away. As it now stands, once a widowed mother receives a

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dependant parent's pension she may keep it, no matter what other earnings she might have after she has gone on the pension. A provision found its way into the bill that would make it possible to cut off a parent's pension in such a case. Members of the committee will remember the very interesting time we had on that, but in the end we were able to get a unanimous decision that such a withdrawal of a right should not be there and so the bill was worded in such a way that the act would remain as it is.

So, Mr. Speaker, these are the various things with which we dealt in the committee. We had a few votes in which we actually divided. Generally, we reached either a kind of compromise or unanimity and, on the whole, I submit we have done fairly well. There is one item to which I referred earlier, and which I shall leave to the last because I intend to make it the subject of an amendment. Before I come to that, may I say I am becoming a little apprehensive about when and how we will deal with the companion operation to this, namely the 10 per cent increase in disability pensions and the 15 per cent increase in war veterans allowances. Even though the CBC does not know it, I know it is not part of this bill. I was awakened this morning with the news that today we were to debate a bill to provide for a 10 per cent increase in pensions and a 15 per cent increase in allowances on April 1. That is not in this bill. We are all aware of that. But I ask, when and how is that to be done. We were told it would be done by an estimate or estimates. The estimates for 1971-72 were tabled yesterday and I do not find any such provisions in those estimates.

When I asked the President of the Treasury Board about this he said he would have to take the question as notice. There are one or two items in the estimates in which there is reference to authority for the Treasury Board to increase or decrease certain grants, and when I see things like that I become a little anxious. My fear is we may be jockeyed out of our right to debate these increases or that they may be put off until we are so close to April we will be told if we debate them at all we will delay their coming into effect. We do not do that in respect of veterans matters. I believe we should have the right to discuss these things and, in particular, any changes the government is making by way of regulations in respect of war veterans allowances. Many veterans who receive these allowances are disturbed now because they have received from Mr. Donald Thompson, the new chairman of that board, a notice to the effect that they must apply for the guaranteed income supplement. First, they had a letter advising them it was in their interest to do so. Then, they had a second letter saying the matter had been reviewed and they were advised to accept it because if they did not they would be considered as having received it in any event.

Mr. Francis: Mr. Speaker,—

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): If my friend is rising on a point of order, perhaps I might be allowed to finish, and save his time and mine. I realize that war veterans allowances are not before us in this bill, but I submit this is a related matter. My plea to the minister is