

Adjournment Debate

The government energy pricing policy and the budget have hit particularly hard at recipients of veterans pensions. Would the minister consider an energy supplement to pension payments?

To which the minister answered:

This will be taken into consideration, Madam Speaker.

Perhaps we will have an answer tonight. This also ties in to another problem concerning veterans affairs, concerning a matter which has been raised time and time again. That is the need for immediate legislation to eliminate the phasing in of a section of Bill C-40, thereby making all veterans' widows eligible now for an increase in their pension.

I wish to put on the record an example of what the government is proposing for some widows. In 1986, the government proposed that some widows receive an additional increase of \$25.35 and those with some dependants receive \$1.52. I am sure that everyone in the House realizes that by 1986 that amount will be just the same as handing somebody nothing. We want all the phasing in to become effective immediately. I hope the parliamentary secretary will announce tonight that a piece of legislation dealing with the veterans' widows will be brought in before we recess for the summer. I hope that the parliamentary secretary will pass on to the acting minister the suggestion that he read the June issue of the *Legion* which has an excellent article on the veterans' widows and the problems they are experiencing.

This ties in with another serious problem we have within veterans affairs, a matter I raised recently. It concerns the delay in processing pension applications. It is taking from one to five years to process veterans' pension applications in Canada. I have described this a number of times as nothing but a national disgrace. In the United States they process veterans' pension applications in 60 to 97 days. I raised this matter on June 9, 1981. The answers I received came from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of State for Mines (Mr. Masters). I do not know how he got into the act. However, his answer to me with regard to the delay in the processing of the applications, as found on page 10443 of *Hansard* reads:

I would like to see the adjudication time reduced. However, I would not like to see it reduced at the expense of the veteran.

I found that to be a very strange sentence. The death rate is very high among veterans waiting for pension applications to be processed. The parliamentary secretary went on to say:

Steps have to be taken to improve the pension system and to curtail the delays in adjudication.

We have seen no evidence at all of any speeding up in this process. The parliamentary secretary also said that the veterans' organization support the present legislation and they do not want to see things speeded up too much. That statement is incorrect.

I would refer the parliamentary secretary and the acting minister to the submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs presented by the Royal Canadian Legion a couple of weeks ago. There is a section in that submission on the delays of pension adjudications. On page 4 we find:

The veteran population is dismayed by the delays which persist in the processing of pension claims and ancillary benefits.

They do not say anything about supporting what is going on right now and they do not want to see any speed. They never made any such statement. In the submission at page 7, we find:

Other than to again put forward the thought of cancelling the move of the Canadian Pension Commission to Charlottetown, the Royal Canadian Legion can offer no solution to resolve this question of delays which quite obviously is related to the staffing situation. However, the government surely has to do something quite quickly to correct this issue!

That is why I am hoping we have something concrete from the parliamentary secretary tonight in regard to the delays in processing of pension applications, or some kind of energy credit to veterans to assist them.

● (2205)

In addition, Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General has run into problems in relation to the move of DVA to Prince Edward Island, and he points out:

—that less than 20 per cent of Headquarters personnel, on strength at the time of the relocation announcement, was planning to move to Prince Edward Island.

The Auditor General went on to say, in an audit he did recently into the Veterans Affairs Department:

Notwithstanding intentions to relocate with a minimum of disruption... Those not wishing to relocate have been given priority status by the Public Service Commission in their search for other employment in the National Capital Region.

The chairman of the Pension Commission has stated that this is causing him no end of problems with staff quitting and refusing to move. We also know that many of the veterans' service documents are in the archives and we want to know how—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérald Laniel (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce): Mr. Speaker, I shall gladly try to answer the questions asked by the hon. member, but I must still restrict myself to the question he put on February 23. I am all the more happy as he raised all these questions quite coolly. He is often very aggressive, but it is interesting all the same to note that some members are bent on safeguarding the interests of veterans. Of course, we all do it in our own fashion. The hon. member may be more aggressive than I am, but not every member is blessed with a cheerful disposition like mine.

[English]

Mr. Speaker, in the question raised by the hon. member on February 23 he touched upon only one point, the question of indexing veterans' benefits to the rise in the real cost of living. This is the question I will try to answer.

For many years now all veterans' benefits awarded under the Pension Act and the War Veterans Allowance Act have been tied to the rise in the consumer price index. The consumer price index system of changing rates is used almost univer-