

War Veterans Allowance Act

to all the measures proposed today, which, we hope, will be adopted. That is to say, we could improve the program offered to veterans, a program that is in their interest and also in the interest of Canadian taxpayers, in such a way that, with amendments, it will be possible to harmonize two programs administered by two separate departments.

The Minister of Veterans Affairs would certainly have preferred to be in the House himself today to propose increases in the benefits paid to more than 40,000 recipients of War Veterans Allowances and Civilian War Allowances. Those people are under 65, but right now they do not receive as much federal assistance as do the recipients of those allowances who, because of their age, are eligible for old age security benefits and the guaranteed income supplement. Parliament acknowledged the unfairness of the situation as early as 1980 when Bill C-40 was passed. As a result of the adoption of the Bill introduced today, parity between both groups of recipients will become a reality in April 1986, after a series of annual increases. In the opinion of the Government, parity must be achieved immediately. We recommend that, as of July 1 next, recipients under 65 now receiving the single rate allowance be entitled to \$20 more a month, and that married rate recipients be entitled to \$25 more a month. This way, all veterans allowance recipients will be on the same footing regardless of age.

• (1520)

I am convinced that Hon. Members will support this Bill. It is obvious that recipients under the aid program for veterans less than 65 years of age do need additional financial assistance, particularly the 26,000 veterans now receiving the single rate allowance and the 13,000 widows who need that additional assistance. There is no need to emphasize that the veterans allowance is the main source of income of those people. It has been estimated that earlier parity will cost \$16.8 million. Such expenditures are in keeping with the Government's commitment to give priority to the most needy.

The Minister is proposing other amendments to the Wars Veterans Allowance Act and to the Civilian War Pensions and Allowances Act. It is a matter of technicalities in most cases and, with your permission, Mr. Speaker, I will not go into that. However, I should like to say more about one of those amendments to the Civilian War Pensions and Allowances Act which will enable merchant marine personnel who served in Korean waters between 1950 and 1953 to apply for allowances.

Under the existing legislation, civilians who served aboard Canadian or Allied ships in Korea are not eligible for the civilian war allowances. That is unacceptable since civilians with similar service in dangerous waters during World Wars I and II are already eligible for such veterans allowances. That is why we want those servicemen or persons who were in Korea to be eligible as well.

Hon. Members will appreciate that department officials must adapt their administrative procedures concerning veterans affairs to those of the Department of National Health and

Welfare so as to implement more equitably the old age security and guaranteed income supplement programs.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed amendments will certainly entail considerable savings while making it possible for allowance recipients to maintain their special relationship with the Department of Veterans Affairs which serves them and, of course, to continue to avail themselves of the services of officials who represent and defend them within the Department of Veterans Affairs. I would like to mention that these changes will make the program easier to understand and more accessible.

I want to remind Hon. Members that, in all programs designed for senior citizens, simplicity is a major factor. In addition, Mr. Speaker, a great many allowance recipients, at present and in the future, will benefit financially from this new formula. Let me explain how we shall be able to provide better services while greatly reducing the red tape involved.

At the present time, an allowance recipient who also gets the guaranteed income supplement and old age security pension must file a separate statement of income, first with the Department of Veterans Affairs, and then with the Department of National Health and Welfare. These two Departments process the statements separately, even though they contain virtually the same information. This overlapping of efforts must be eliminated, and the sooner the better. This is why the amendments we are suggesting will eliminate this duplication. Beginning April 1, 1986, all allowance recipients who get both the old age security pension and the guaranteed income supplement will present a single statement to the Department of National Health and Welfare. These veterans will therefore have one form less to fill in, which means that Government interference in their lives will be reduced.

The data collected under the two programs can then be directed to the Department of Veterans Affairs by way of transfers between the data banks. We are at the age of electronics and computers, and I believe that these can be used in the best interests of Government administration.

I want to emphasize that allowance recipients will not be cut off from the Department of Veterans Affairs. The Department will continue to assess eligibility according to length of service and the War Veterans Allowance Board will continue with its important process of examining and hearing the appeals independently. In addition, the Bureau of Pension Advocates will offer for the first time its services to those who apply for allowances and also to recipients, which will enhance in my opinion the relationship between these veterans and their Department.

Mr. Speaker, the major changes will include a switch to the calendar year for the allowance programs, as is already used for the old age security pension and the review periods for the administration of the guaranteed income supplement. This change will benefit most recipients of veterans' assistance. At