

I want to thank you, Mr. Minister, for your kind remarks of welcome.

Now, Mr. Chairman, gentlemen, and members of the committee, I believe you have copies available of our brief, so with your permission, sir, I will just read it to you.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Parliamentary Committee: we sincerely appreciate the opportunity of appearing before a Special Parliamentary Committee on Veterans Affairs. It is our opinion that referring new veterans' legislation and proposed amendments to such legislation for the consideration of parliamentary committees is a good practice. We know that successive special parliamentary committees have played a very important part in the preparation and adoption of the many items of legislation which today provide substantial benefits to Canadian ex-service men and women. We hope that we will continue to enjoy the privilege of appearing before parliamentary committees on Veterans Affairs and that our representations will at all times be considered as helpful and constructive as they are intended to be.

We understand that the terms of reference of this committee permit consideration only of Bill 164 presently before you. However, we will address our remarks to certain specific recommendations with respect to war veterans' allowances. We regret that some of these do not come within the terms of reference of the committee, but we would express the hope that in such cases the committee might see fit to refer these matters to the government with a request that they be given earnest and early consideration.

We would urgently request that this committee recommend to the government the immediate adoption of the following measures:—

1. Basic rates of war veterans' allowance

Recommendation

That the basic rate of war veterans' allowance be increased to \$60.00 per month for a single veteran, and \$120 per month for those who are married.

Comment

We are pleased to note that the basic rate for unmarried recipients as set forth in Bill 164 meets in full the Legion's requests, and we wish to commend the government for the action taken in this regard.

We now understand from the minister's statement to the House of Commons on March 4th, that the regulations governing the assistance fund will make it possible to supplement the married rate—and the single rate too—to \$120 per month where the need is established. This means, however, that before the supplementation is forthcoming the veteran must be subjected to a second means test. There is also the possibility that assistance may be denied in some legitimate cases. Surely it is more equitable to set the basic rate for married recipients at \$120.

The arguments in support of our request for the increase to \$120 per month are as valid today as ever. They are:—

1. The war veteran has always been recognized by the Canadian people and by successive Canadian governments as meriting special consideration, and there can therefore be no basis for serious criticism if W.V.A. rates are higher than those payable to old age pensioners.

Canada's old age pension at 70 without a means test is largely financed by taxes designated for that particular purpose. Old age pension before the age of 70, in cases of need, requires only 20 years' residence in Canada to qualify—surely not a harsh or onerous requirement. But the basis of eligibility for W.V.A. is service in a theatre of war—a very different matter. The benefits available must therefore be measured by a different yardstick.