

Veterans Affairs Committee Report

continuously in need of hospital care. For those in need, and an appreciable number of our veterans are in need, provision was made and included in the 1968-69 estimates to the extent of about \$426 million. This is an increase of \$19.1 million over the 1967-68 estimates and reflects the concern of the government about the welfare of veterans and their dependants who need help.

There have been three revisions in the pension rates since 1964. The first one was effective from September 1, 1964, and represented a 10 per cent increase across the board. The second increase became effective on September 1, 1966. It represented a 15 per cent increase in the basic rates in the pensions for veterans and widows. The third revision, which went into effect on January 1, 1968, brought in a 15 per cent increase for all veterans in all cases. No Canadian war veteran needs to apply for charity for himself or his family. I am confident that the government will enact legislation which will make unnecessary the humiliating recourse to public welfare.

The recommendations placed before the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs by several veterans organizations have been most helpful to members of that committee on which I have been most happy to serve. I can say that submissions were made with dignity and restraint. I am sure the government has taken note of them. The minister pointed out to the committee on April 17, 1969, certain matters of importance to veterans. I quote what he is reported to have said:

First, the program of welfare services, allowances and other benefits is one that seeks to ensure that all persons eligible for war veterans allowance, civilian war allowance and other veterans benefits are assisted to the full extent of the provisions of the various statutes affected.

The second is the pension program administered by the Canadian Pension Commission, which is a quasi-judicial body reporting to Parliament through the Minister of Veterans Affairs. Under this program, pensions for disability and death are provided as set forth in the Pension Act. The program also includes the adjudication of claims for pensions under several other statutes including The Civilian War Pensions and Allowances Act, the R.C.M.P. Superannuation Act and the R.C.M.P. Pension Continuation Act.

A third program is concerned with the provision of treatment services to veterans and to other designated classes of patients as authorized by the veterans treatment regulations.

Fourth, the Soldier Settlement and Veterans Land Act program seeks to effect the successful settlement of qualified veterans as farmers, small holders, commercial fishermen and homesteaders, including Indian veterans on reserves.

[Mr. Badanai.]

The fifth of the programs, departmental administration, is concerned with the effective and efficient provision of a number of common professional and administrative services.

The opposition has been rather harsh in criticising the unavoidable delay in referring the Woods committee report to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs for study and recommendation. This report is merely a survey of the work and organization of the Canadian Pension Commission and was presented to the former Minister of Veterans Affairs in March, 1968, shortly before the dissolution of the last parliament. I assume that hon. members have read this very thorough study of the organization and operation of the Canadian Pension Commission. The study contains some far-reaching recommendations, many of which will undoubtedly result in major amendments to the Pension Act. Hence we have had the unavoidable delay in dealing with this legislation.

One recommendation of the study is the establishment of an appeal board which will have jurisdiction over the Pension Commission. Under the present system appeals may be heard by commissioners. An applicant must present his case to commissioners working with colleagues who may already have ruled against the applicant. There is no appeal to an independent body. The Woods Committee report states that when an applicant's claim has been denied there is no agency or court to which he may take his case. It is therefore perfectly clear that the system is inadequate in ensuring justice. The objection to what is recommended may stem from the assumption that the appointment of a pension appeal board would result in superimposing upon the commission a superior authority. I agree with the report where it says that, in essence, the commission should be an administrative body which can operate satisfactorily only if the responsibility for final decision is transferred to a senior body such as a pension appeal board.

Cases involving claimants in my constituency have been brought to my attention. After having been rejected by the commissioners these claimants have gone to their own doctors and the medical reports of those doctors were turned down by the pension commissioners. This leads one to believe that there is a form of discrimination in the handling of independent reports. When I made representations on behalf of some of these unfortunate claimants I was told politely that the private doctor's report had been considered by the commissioners but that the original diagnosis,