

Veterans Affairs

● (1740)

I would like to congratulate the Minister on his fine work. The words of my constituents in Gloucester are all favourable on the moves the Minister has made for veterans. That is another reason I stand to support my colleague today in his efforts to better the lot of some heroes of World War I.

As we know, Mr. Speaker, there are many heroes, not the least of whom reside in my riding. World War I was to be the war to end all wars. We know that that did not come about, unfortunately. There were also many heroes in World War II. That is why I am pleased to support my colleague, the Hon. Member for Victoria and give him my wholehearted support for this motion.

Mr. Fred King (Okanagan-Similkameen): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased indeed to speak in support of this very worthy motion which would seek to bring a degree of equity to a matter which, by national measurement, may not assume very significant proportions, but which, to a number of deserving Canadians, would in fact be of considerable significance.

The financial cost implicit in the recommendation is not a consideration. It is, therefore, increasingly important that this symbolic gesture of appreciation to those who served our country's interest with such courage and valour be made. It is important that they should receive this tangible acknowledgment that we recognize them and their individual actions. We fully expect that this motion will pass. We endorse the purpose of the motion which states that:

—the Government should consider the advisability of paying veterans of World War I and all recipients of the DSO, the same annuities with respect to gallantry awards received by veterans of World War II.

We have confidence in the end result of this consideration. We should note that the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Hees) has already written a letter to the British High Commissioner in Canada asking for information pertaining to the numbers of Canadians who are eligible to receive this gallantry award because of specific decorations which they received for service during World War II. Until the figure is obtained from the United Kingdom with respect to those Canadians for whom they accepted responsibility in the matter of gallantry awards, it is not possible to respond to the request through Government of Canada action.

It is with a degree of satisfaction that we would point out that the proposed action is completely consistent with the directions taken by the present Government of Canada. The spirit of this motion reflects and parallels the desire expressed in Bill C-28, which is to ensure that veterans and their dependents be treated with equity and generosity compatible with the sacrifices which they made and the service they rendered their nation.

I believe that the entire nation endorses this general thrust in all that is done through the Department of Veterans Affairs. It is certainly the case that the Minister has, by deed and word, spoken encouragingly of the attitude of the Government in respect of expanded and improved programs for the veterans of Canada.

We are all aware that such legitimate responses to identify inadequacies in present legislation and present programs cannot be immediately implemented because of financial constraints. However, this motion should confront no such impediment since the cost is insignificant. We appreciate the opportunity to speak in support of the motion and commend the Hon. Member for Victoria (Mr. McKinnon) on his presentation.

Mr. Ted Schellenberg (Nanaimo-Alberni): Mr. Speaker, it is with considerable pride that I rise today as the grandson of a veteran of World War I, the son of a veteran of World War II, and a former member of the armed services of Canada myself. I am very pleased to support the private Member's motion of my colleague from Victoria (Mr. McKinnon). In relative terms, he is my neighbour on Vancouver Island in British Columbia.

I think it is important that the Government act on this matter, and I expect it will. After all, this is the same Government that, through Bill C-28, increased pensions for our veterans. I think it worth noting today, as we discuss those who fought to protect what we hold dear, just what Bill C-28 made possible.

Through Bill C-28, the basic rate of pension will be increased to reflect parity with the average take-home pay of selected categories of public servants. The basic rate of pension will be increased each year hereafter by the percentage increase in the above-mentioned take-home pay, or by the percentage increase in the Consumer Price Index, whichever is the greater. Disability pensions at the married rate will be continued for a full year following the death of a pensioner. Survivors of pensioners who had been receiving an Attendance and-or an Exceptional Incapacity Allowance will see the allowances continued for a full year following the death of the pensioner. It will be enshrined in the legislation that whenever a split decision occurs in the adjudication of a veteran's pension claim, the decision favouring the veteran is the decision of the Commission.

More than 700,000 Canadian veterans will directly benefit as a result of that Bill. Should the Department of Veterans Affairs act on the motion of my colleague from Victoria, over 22,000 veterans of World War I will benefit. This attention is long overdue. The average age of these people is 87. Their ranks are becoming thin. How often have we watched the veterans file past us during Remembrance Day ceremonies? How many veterans of that first war to end all wars have marched on to their final reward without receiving the attention they deserve from their nation? This thank-you, if we can call it that, is long overdue.

I commend my hon. colleague from Victoria for his motion. I know it arises from his sincere representation, over many years, to represent those who served Canada so well. I think I speak for all members of this Chamber when I say that the Hon. Member for Victoria is still fighting the battles that count and still serving his nation so well. I urge our Government to support this Bill.