

Adjournment Debate

Mr. John Campbell (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Veterans Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Winnipeg-Assiniboine (Mr. McKenzie) for the opportunity to clarify the situation concerning the backlog of cases to be heard by the Pension Review Board.

When an application is received, action is initiated without delay, usually within the same week, to keep the applicant informed about the appeal process. The backlog arose some four years ago when applications to the Board increased from 550 appeals to 1,400 appeals. Three years ago the government appointed two additional ad hoc members to the board, thus increasing the board's production from 560 decisions to 1,100 decisions annually. Unfortunately, there remained some 200 cases which were not heard, and the Pensions Review Board was not meeting the demand for appeals.

Under the previous government, vacancies occurred and the membership of the board was never brought up to strength. These unfulfilled positions had the unfortunate effect of compounding the problem.

Upon forming the government last year, we moved quickly to bring the board to full strength and the acting minister personally recommended and obtained government approval to provide six additional person-years to assist board members in the researching and gathering of facts, thus speeding up the appeal process to meet demand. The year-end statistics show that the Pensions Review Board is now disposing of more cases than new applications received.

Contrary to the statement by my hon. friend, progress has been made and we have taken the steps necessary to ensure that further progress is made in reducing the backlog. The Canadian Pension Commission is presently dealing with a backlog of cases at the first division level. Problems created by the loss of trained medical and other support staff and the lengthy time it takes to train new staff have contributed to the increase in time required to prepare a case for a first decision. Other factors, such as the availability of pertinent medical information only obtainable from private physicians or non-departmental hospitals have also contributed to delays in adjudication. During the last meeting of the Standing Committee of Veterans Affairs the chairman of the Canadian Pension Commission explained the situation at length with regard to delays in adjudication.

It should be noted that a few months ago Parliament gave the commission the added responsibility for adjudication on the award of proportionate pensions for widows. These applications are being processed rapidly with an absolute minimum of delay. Not long ago there were many complaints about the length of time required to hear a claim which was appealed to the second level of adjudication, namely, entitlement award hearings. The commission has been able to reduce the waiting period so that now it is less than at any time in the last ten years. There is every reason to believe it will be just as successful in reducing the number of claims awaiting first decisions.

Hon. members will know that the Pension Act makes provisions for retroactive awards to successful applicants so that

applicants are not penalized for delays in adjudication beyond their control. We are very aware of the difficulties delays cause to our veterans and their families, and we are taking steps to improve the situation.

NATIONAL ENERGY PROGRAM—MULTINATIONAL OIL COMPANIES MOVING TO MEET CANADIAN OWNERSHIP REQUIREMENTS

Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma): Mr. Speaker, on February 11, 1981, I put a question to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Lalonde) concerning the National Energy Program and what has happened with respect to Canadianization.

It seems to me there are three important parts to the program. The first is the pricing and distribution of revenues, which gets perhaps 80 per cent or 90 per cent of the present publicity and interest across the country. The second, which is very important, relates to conservation and substitution. I hope that in the next month or so the minister will be moving ahead with plans for greater conservation and substitution of oil by natural gas, electricity and renewable energy sources. The third part which is very important and certainly will be important to the future of this country relates to the Canadianization program.

In my question, I asked the minister if he could confirm press reports that some seven multinational oil companies were moving rapidly toward Canadianization.

● (2210)

This question was based on a press report on page six of the *Ottawa Citizen* of February 10, 1981, to the effect that multinationals are scrambling on to the bandwagon. The press report suggested that several oil companies, Getty, Murphy, Suncor and Ultramar, are about to be taken over by Canadian companies in order to qualify for the petroleum incentive grant system which will be available to Canadian-owned companies.

It further suggests that Gulf Canada submitted a report to its parent company in the United States suggesting three alternatives for Canadianization of that company. It suggests that Shell and Mobil are negotiating with medium-sized Canadian companies for greater Canadian ownership and corporate arrangements which would make them eligible for the Canadian petroleum incentive grants as well.

If these negotiations are taking place, it will be a major step toward breaking the log jam and moving toward greater Canadianization of our petroleum industry, especially when coupled with the actions by Dome in its move toward Canadianization and, of course, the recent takeover of Petrofina by PetroCan.

The president of Imperial Oil appeared before the Standing Committee on National Resources and Public Works. He indicated that company was not contemplating corporate structure changes, that it would be able to continue on without moving toward greater Canadianization. It has been suggested in some circles that by using farm-in arrangements for drilling