

Veterans' Pensions

it. This will be cleared up if the minister wishes to provide the answers during the time we are in Committee of the Whole. I suggest that this, like so many Liberal promises, looks good on the surface; you have to get underneath to determine exactly what is going on. There is a cut here and it seems to me we are moving in the direction that veterans will not be given any treatment simply because they are veterans. They will get the old age pension and the guaranteed income supplement and the idea of treating the guaranteed income supplement as part of their income will deprive them of some income. In the long run, the aim is to treat veterans the same as everybody else; they will get this pension in the same way as if they were drawing OAS and GIS.

I do not wish to take more time as I am sure the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre will wish to carry on. We look forward to reaching committee stage.

Hon. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, like the hon. member for Victoria (Mr. McKinnon) I should like to commence my remarks this afternoon by extending a warm welcome to the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. MacDonald). We are pleased he has been able to come back to the House this afternoon for what, in the view of many of us, is an historic occasion.

Because it is that kind of an occasion I am particularly glad also to see in the gallery—I trust Mr. Speaker will not call me to order for noting people in the gallery—the deputy minister, the chairman of the Canadian Pension Commission, the chief pensions advocate and a few other officials of the Department of Veterans Affairs and its associated agencies. I do not see the chairman of the War Veterans Allowance Board—I guess he has been transferred to Charlottetown. But, Mr. Speaker, even if there is lots to do back in the store I believe these persons have the right to be here this afternoon for what I have already referred to as an important occasion in the history of our veterans' legislation.

As both the minister and the hon. member for Victoria pointed out, the bill deals with two main sections of our veterans' legislation, namely, the 48 per cent rule that applies to the widows of disabled veterans and the War Veterans Allowance Act. In both cases something is being done that we have waited for over a very long time.

As the minister indicated, when the Pension Act was first brought in, the provision for a widow's pension applied only if the veteran's disability had been assessed at the rate of 80 per cent. About 50 years ago that was changed to 50 per cent, which in practical terms works out to 48 per cent. But there it has stood for 50 years. During that period of time there have been many efforts to get the legislation changed; I think I need hardly say any more to underline my contention that this is an historic day.

Likewise with respect to the War Veterans Allowances Act, we are taking steps to make the position the same for veterans over 65 as for veterans under 65, and we are also ending the uncertainty about increases in the guaranteed income supplement being passed on to veterans or to veterans' widows.

I shall deal a little later with the remarks made by the member for Victoria; I think he has not read correctly the provisions of the bill which is now before us in that respect. Instead of the government being criticized on this point, I think we should give credit. Up to this point we had to ask, each time there was an increase in the guaranteed income supplement, whether it would be passed on to the veterans receiving war veterans allowance. If the member for Victoria will look at page 29 of the bill, he will find there a clause which provides that from here on the ceiling on the War Veterans Allowance Act will go up automatically when there is an increase in old age security or in the guaranteed income supplement.

If you will pardon another moment of personal indulgence, Mr. Speaker—you reach a point, you know, at which you enjoy history, especially when you can look back and say you were there for some of it—at about noon today I took a moment to go into the library and do a little looking into ancient *Hansards*. I was pretty sure I would find what I was looking for and, sure enough, there it was. I found that it was in the month of May, 1943—that is more than 37 years ago—that I made my first intervention in the House of Commons with respect to veterans affairs. What was it about? It was about the widows of veterans of World War I. So I am hardly entering into a new field when I take part today in a debate dealing with the widows of veterans.

• (1610)

As you know, Mr. Speaker, because of your association with veterans affairs and the veterans affairs committees in the past, and for a while, sir, you were also parliamentary secretary to the minister of veterans affairs, this matter of the 48 per cent rule has been debated time and time again. We had perhaps the definitive recommendation that it be corrected when Mr. Justice Mervyn Woods brought down his report. We had it again in the Hermann report, and on two or three occasions we had recommendations from the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs that the 48 per cent rule be corrected.

It is good to know that persistence on the part of many people does pay and that we have reached this point today. Like the hon. member for Victoria (Mr. McKinnon), I should like to give some of the credit to those people we are not supposed to notice, those who are in the gallery today. They and their predecessors, a long line of employees in the Department of Veterans Affairs, have done a good job.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles: But, sir, we have now reached the point where we are changing the 48 per cent rule, and this is a day to celebrate. Before the afternoon is over, I shall probably have a critical word or two to say about this and I shall have something to say about the things that are not in the bill. The minister may say, "Stanley, I thought you were my friend." Well, I am, and even after I have found fault with some things in the bill and have pointed out some of its shortcomings, I still