

*Old Age and Veterans' Pensions*

with my colleague from Winnipeg North Centre that tens of thousands of Canadians are facing an emergency situation. I am certain no member of this House would disagree with the intent of the motion. Therefore, I plead in the name of humanity that tonight this House vote unanimously for the motion on a recorded division.

**Mr. David Weatherhead (Scarborough West):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to take part in the debate on this motion which is so important to many senior citizens, veterans and their dependants in my riding, and indeed all across the country. As a member of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs of the House of Commons, I intend to spend much of the short time allotted to me today in discussing the government's white paper on veterans pensions which is now before the committee. However, before doing so I should like to comment on that part of the motion which relates to the old age security pension and to improving the quality of life of all our older and retired people.

In a speech I made in the House of Commons on October 28, 1969, I stated that I could see no reason why the old age security pension and the guaranteed income supplement could not be at least increased annually at the same rate as the cost of living increased. I also suggested in my speech that the guaranteed income supplement be increased by at least \$25 a month, at a cost of about \$150 million a year, in order that the 500,000 of our senior citizens with no other income at all should receive substantial help.

In addition to that, in a speech I made here last April 6 I gave detailed reasons why I am in favour of a guaranteed annual income plan linked to work incentives. While I am still of these opinions, I am willing to wait for the white paper on social security reform which is to be issued in the next couple of months to ascertain how the government proposes tying in and co-ordinating proposals regarding senior citizens and social welfare proposals affecting all age groups of our population.

We have before us today a very strangely worded motion as it relates to veterans benefits. Not only is the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) aware that the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Dubé) is heading a delegation of Canadians at important ceremonies in Holland marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of that country's liberation; he is also fully aware that the minister has stated repeatedly in the white paper, in the committee and in this House that the

[Mr. Benjamin.]

rates of both pensions and war veterans allowances are currently being carefully reviewed by the government.

The hon. member would have the government effect increases immediately—this afternoon. It seems to me that the government's approach is a very clear and rational one which will ensure greater benefits for all Canadians and for veterans in particular. The reasoning behind this course, this assessment of all aspects of social legislation, has also been made very clear and is, to me, unimpeachable. I for one do not want to see a hodge-podge of social programs developed much further without this serious effort to co-ordinate our approach.

On June 17 last year the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) made this clear in an answer he gave during the question period, when he said as reported at page 10242 of *Hansard*:

Of course, Mr. Speaker, this is linked to the policy which has been acknowledged by the government, that we have to review all aspects of social legislation. We are doing this; we do not want to settle special cases. A special plea can be made not only for the veterans but for old people, for retired civil servants, and for all sections of people in society. We are trying to establish a policy that will review this legislation at as little cost to the Canadian people as is necessary.

In the white paper on disability pensions, the government also stated:

There have been far-reaching changes in Canada's social and economic environment since the pension program was first introduced 50 years ago, and in particular many new social development programs of various kinds have meanwhile been initiated. These numerous plans have evolved individually over the years, and the government considers that the time has come to examine the entire fabric in order to achieve greater consistency between the various elements, and to eliminate unintended gaps or duplications.

Since that time, of course, the minister has repeatedly assured this House that these rates were very seriously being reviewed in their context of the whole fabric of social legislation. Furthermore, both the Prime Minister and the minister have assured the House that the fact these rates are included in a review of social legislation in no way implies that the government looks upon them as social welfare. Quite the contrary, it has been repeatedly stated that veterans legislation is, of course, social legislation. It is certainly not economic, cultural, external affairs or defence; it definitely falls under the broad category of social legislation.

However, no one on this side, to my knowledge, has ever said that veterans pensions are social welfare—because they are not. They do