

Superannuation

average, \$800, just to give you a ratio of the benefits to be received.

Sorry, I made a mistake. The benefits on average to be received are in the nature of \$4,900 annually. The repayments to be retained, that is to say, previously paid out and now recovered, will be in the area of \$1,800 on average. There will be no interest. You can see from that that it is a pretty good deal.

Mr. Gauthier: I just want to be reassured. Will it be based on an actuarial form? In other words, if the person is 75 years old, will you be requiring him or her to pay more quickly than someone who would be 62 years of age or 63 years of age, whose life expectancy and capacity to meet and cope with that may be longer. Will there be any consideration given to that?

Mr. Merrithew: Perhaps I could comment on this. This refers essentially to the benefits for the veterans and their survivors. One should understand that veterans have always had preferential treatment under the Pension Act. While the benefits to surviving spouses would cease immediately, with many of our other pension programs, veterans are given a lump sum payment for the following year. I realize this calls for repayment of that.

I think your question is, will it be demanded of them in one lump sum payment. No. It will be done according to the survivor's status. As you probably know, the Canadian Pension Commission deals with that and the applications go through them. They have always been very caring, very compassionate and very understanding of the personal circumstances of both the veterans and their survivors. Under no circumstances, would undue hardship be impacted upon the survivor.

Mrs. Catterall: I have two questions. One is very directly on the last point. My understanding was that, in fact, that pensioners would not have to rely on anybody's compassion or solicitude for their well-being, but that they would have the option as to how they chose to make these repayments beyond a certain minimum. Could I have a clarification on that?

Mr. Merrithew: As I mentioned before, the commission has always dealt directly with the pensioner. They report to this House through me. They are independent. They have always had the care and compassion for the circumstances of the recipient. They do have the admin-

istrative discretion to make arrangements which are in the best interests of the survivor. If there has been an overpayment, it is the duty of the Crown to try to recover to what extent it can. We have not had any great number of complaints of the commission being unduly harsh on the repayment schedule required.

• (1230)

Mr. Butland: Mr. Chairman, I am not sure if this is the appropriate timing of this question, but I have been approached by several public servants in the community of Sault Ste. Marie with regard to whether there has been any consideration at all of some window in time, as in other professions, to offer some incentive for those to take an early retirement, given the fact that there has been reduction in the Public Service in the past. I understand that trend will continue in the future. For instance, for someone at age 54 with 27 years service, the penalty is 15 per cent. Has there been any consideration at all to opening this window of time without such an onerous penalty?

Mr. Crosby: Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the Member's concern. It is beyond the immediate scope of this Bill which as I have said and repeat deals with the restoration of rights lost as a result of remarriage.

I may respond in two ways: first, the President of the Treasury Board and the Government are well aware of similar programs utilized in other provinces and places. One of the views that has been expressed and bears merit is that the federal provisions are already fairly generous. They permit retirement at age 55 with 30 years service. I can speak from experience that 55 years of age is pretty young to retire. I hope that it is, otherwise I would be out of here. It will be looked at in terms of a broad pension reform. Early retirement certainly has its merits, and I am sure it will be given consideration.

Mrs. Stewart: Mr. Chairman, I have a concern that I would like to express on behalf of one of my constituents who is a widow of a war veteran. She understood about a year and a half ago that she would be able to remarry and still claim her widow's pension. She remarried without notifying Veterans Affairs. She has now found out from Veterans Affairs that she was receiving payments "illegally". This woman of strong moral value and conviction had a hard time remarrying. Now she is going to divorce