

*War Veterans Allowance Act*

made a definite statement in this regard. In answer to a question which I put to him in the House, the Minister said:

With respect to increasing the interest reduction, as I have indicated to the Hon. Member, I will be proposing a number of legislative amendments to the War Veterans Allowance Act as a follow-up to the study which was conducted over the past number of months, and a provision to increase the interest earnings deduction will be one of those proposals.

This Bill does not live up to the promises of the Minister. The interest earning deduction is not increased. The Bill simply deletes reference to the limit on interest income from the War Veterans Allowance Act. Henceforth, the limit will be set by regulation, and there is no indication that the Minister intends to increase the limit when he draws up the necessary regulations. We cannot be sure what the Minister's intentions are because, although these regulations will have to be in place when the Bill comes into force, the Minister has not made their contents known to the House.

The Minister has gone on at length about the increased flexibility which will be available to him when he is able to adjust the interest income limit without having to introduce legislation. Parliamentarians would be much more in favour of according the Minister the control he would like, if we had some reason to believe that he will be more prepared to amend regulations in the future than he has been to amend legislation in the past.

While we had been led to expect more from the Minister in some areas, the provisions of the Bill devoted to changing the way in which the Act is administered and to integrating the War Veterans Allowance Program into the Old Age Security Program for veterans over age 65 were unexpected.

The responsibility of the district authorities in adjudicating initial applications for WVA is to be transferred to the Minister or, more realistically, to officials of his Department in district offices. This represents a fundamental change in the principles governing the application and appeal system of the program, and it has a potentially negative impact upon the interests of veterans. The right of veterans to appeal negative decisions made by administrators is an integral component of the program and must be protected from political or bureaucratic interference, and it is not. Similarly, the rights of all veterans across Canada to a consistent interpretation of the Act must be safeguarded by both the Minister and the War Veterans Allowance Board.

One of the most serious and urgent issues associated with the War Veterans Allowance Program is completely neglected by this legislation. Specifically, no effort has been made to clarify or broaden the criteria for eligibility for the War Veterans Allowance Program. A couple of months ago I drew to the attention of the Minister the inconsistency in the decision of the War Veterans Allowance Board concerning the admissibility of travel to Prince Edward Island as service in a theatre of actual war. I suggested that it was time the whole concept of service eligibility was reviewed. After extensive discussion of this issue in committee, I had hoped to see some initiative in the Bill which would have clarified the matter once and for all. I would like to see all those who volunteered for overseas service and who served for a year or more made

eligible to apply for the allowance without regard to where or in what capacity they served their country. Another omission from the legislation is any consideration for the needs of Canadian veterans living overseas.

In omitting to deal with these matters in this so-called overhaul of the program, the Minister is negligent in the performance of his duty. It is his duty to represent the interests of all Canadian veterans, including those who are unable to represent themselves. The Minister accompanied his introduction of this Bill with the announcement of a phased-in extension of eligibility under the Aging Veterans Program to recipients of war veterans allowance. I am pleased the Minister will be making the program more accessible to WVA recipients, but I should like to see this done immediately, without the four-year phase-in. All needy veterans over age 65 should be eligible now.

There are inconsistencies in delivery at the local level. The Minister cited administrative limitations as the reason for the decision to phase in the extension of the program to those veterans who need it most. We expect, therefore, that the Minister will take steps to ensure that a comprehensive policy manual will be designed to enable his officials to administer the program with a full understanding of its principles and a consistent application of the relevant regulations.

In his announcement which accompanied the Bill, the Minister made reference to the eligibility of disability pensioners who receive WVA or are unable to receive it because of their old age security benefits. One assumes that those disability pensioners who now receive assistance under the program will continue to be eligible. However, the Minister gives no indication that he is prepared to assist other disability pensioners to maintain self-sufficiency in their own homes.

Many elderly disability pensioners are not eligible for the Aging Veterans Program at present because their difficulties are not directly related to their pensioned condition. Disability pensions are deducted dollar for dollar from the war veterans allowance, so that single pensioners who receive a pension at the 60 per cent level are ineligible for WVA.

**Mr. Hnatyshyn:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I see that we are approaching four o'clock, at which time we would normally adjourn government business for the day.

● (1600)

As my colleague from Victoria has pointed out, we are anxious to see this Bill go through all stages this afternoon, notwithstanding the delay we have been faced with on the business of the House. There have been some discussions. I have certainly discussed this with my colleague who is bringing forward a Senate Private Members' Bill in Private Members' Hour. There might be a disposition in the House to not see the clock to allow us to proceed through all stages on the understanding that, at the conclusion of this legislation, we proceed to Private Members' Hour, at which time, I understand, the Bill being presented by my colleague will also receive the approval of the House in all stages this afternoon.