

which could look at these particular applications and ensure that no veterans would be shut out.

It seems to me that there is still room for improvement. Some of the pensioners who have applied to increase their pensions find that it takes months to obtain a decision. I must candidly confess that sometimes it takes much longer than months. The veteran is the kind of individual who can face up to reality. He does not mind being told that his application has not been allowed. So would it not be better to tell him that after two or three months, rather than to keep him waiting for some time up to a year before a decision is made?

I would like to add one more thing to which I was privy, and I do not think that I will be violating cabinet secrecy. The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre commented on how hard the Minister of Veterans Affairs fights in cabinet. It was my privilege to be a colleague of the minister for some four years, and I can say that he is a tiger in cabinet on behalf of the veterans. I can also tell hon. members that he has many allies in that particular cabinet or this legislation would not have been brought forward.

**Mr. Joe Reid (St. Catharines):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to be able to rise in this House today to speak on this veterans' legislation. It is legislation which in some small measure will improve the benefits paid to those who have truly served their country, and to the dependants of such veterans. To my mind this bill cannot be passed too quickly.

This bill is not offering the war veterans of Canada any special consideration because of the hardships and debilities suffered on account of their actions in whatever the theatre of action. It is offering simply an opportunity to remove certain inequities and disparities which have existed for far too long. The purpose of this bill is to redress the injustices which certain war veterans and their dependants have suffered through years past.

In other words, this bill is the very minimum which this government can pass. For this reason it is inconceivable that the bill should not pass today. The bill was long overdue when it was tabled by the Conservative government last November. Times and circumstances being what they are, there is no less urgency now.

I would like to congratulate the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) for his initiative and the members on the government side for their co-operation which has made it possible to introduce this bill today.

When the Conservative government introduced the bill last year—or a bill fairly close to what we have before us today—it was recognized that it was the minimum which any government could offer. We knew that it did not begin to go far enough in terms of supporting men and women and their dependants, but that it was a start.

By virtue of the actions of these men and women, it was long past due. It was our intention last year to put through the bill quickly as a first concrete step in improving the lot of veterans. Likewise, it is my sincere hope today that the government will

consider passing this bill only as a first step in an area where further improvement must be made.

The minister in introducing the bill emphasized that these are economy-conscious times and that this government is committed to fiscal responsibility and prudent management of taxpayers' money. I say hurrah to that, but it rings a little shallow, for almost every day in this House we talk about cost overruns, a booming deficit and unchecked spending. I ask the government not to practise fiscal restraint against the veteran or his family. These people have been neglected, I feel, because government has found it too easy to put their cause in a lower priority risk area.

We have all attended Remembrance Day gatherings and have been sombered by the thought of those who lost their lives. But those who came back broken and fractured have become somewhat of a forgotten group and are well down on that list of government priorities. I was happy to hear the words used today—that there is the possibility of further additional consideration being given to the relief of dependants of war veterans and war veterans themselves.

The bill will ensure that widows of disabled veterans are treated equally before the government. It does not ensure, however, as everyone in this House knows, that there will be a decent standard of living for the woman who has never worked outside the home, as is so often the case today, and is not yet eligible for old age security.

The bill will at last remedy one of the great inequities which has already been mentioned a number of times today, an inequity which lasted far too long, the 48 per cent cutoff. It was assumed that where a veteran was in receipt of a 48 per cent pension or more, his death was in some way related to his disability occasioned by serving in the interest of his country. But it was also assumed that the death of a veteran receiving a pension of something less than 48 per cent was not related to service, and as a consequence his widow received no assistance. How ridiculous, and slow we were to act!

As it is, it will be six and a half years before that change in legislation reaches all of the 80 per cent of the veterans and dependants who were assessed at lower than 48 per cent. Let us hope that many of them will live long enough that they will see the day when they too will receive the benefit of this golden anniversary year legislation.

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I am pleased, however, to see that most of those items relating to the veteran's widow, formulated last year by the Conservative government, are carried forward in this bill. A remarried widow will now be allowed to apply for a widow's pension after the dissolution of her subsequent marriage. The continuance of a dependent parent's pension will now be left to the discretion of the commission rather than being automatically stopped as it has heretofore. It will now be possible for someone who maintains the household and looks after dependent children, after both the veteran and his wife have died, to receive that veteran's pension.