

Pension Act

for many people in the Canadian Pension Commission, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and in this House. I am pleased this bill will receive quick passage, and I reiterate the fact that this increase is significant at a time when we must guard against overspending, and demonstrate to the people of Canada our concern in the area of financial restraint. Our Canadian veterans are deserving of this addition to the automatic increases provided under the Pension Act each January in accordance with the consumer price index.

Bill C-58 is a recognition of the service rendered by our Canadian veterans for their country, and a recognition by the Government of Canada of the sacrifice made by, not only the soldiers, sailors, airmen and women of Canada's wartime forces but also by the wives, widows, dependants and orphans of those who gave so much for this nation.

Earlier this year increased benefits were provided for first world war veterans who were prisoners of war, and a smaller group, mostly members of the wartime RCAF who evaded capture after finding themselves in enemy territory. We also improved the situation for some of our servicemen who escaped from prisoner of war camps. Compensation for these first world war prisoners, evaders and escapees now is provided under the same basic terms as for the second world war POWs of Germany and Italy. The fact that parliament acted so quickly on this bill indicates our continued awareness of the debt of gratitude owed to this group of very special Canadians.

I would like to mention at this point the support and advice my department has received in the past on this subject and on others from the veterans' associations of Canada. The Royal Canadian Legion, for instance, through its representations to me by way of briefs and resolutions, has influenced the care and well-being of Canadian veterans down through the years. The National Council of Veterans Associations through its concern for its members, our veterans, has been a valuable source of information and guidance for me in pursuing the goal of better and more appropriate legislation in the best interest of veterans. Their organizations speak with a powerful voice that always makes itself heard.

This legislation, Mr. Speaker, marks another indication of the responsibility we have as Canadians to realize the wants and needs of a segment of our population, the survivors, the maimed, the bereaved of world wars and the people of our nation who will be marked by the devastation of war to the end of their lives. Widows and orphans are as much victims of war as our soldiers, sailors, and airmen. Over the past years we have attempted to assist these men and women who gave so much in a time of need, but we must not sit back and congratulate ourselves for what we have accomplished. Rather we must constantly review and update what we have accepted as our responsibility, our debt.

Successive Canadian parliaments have shown, and this one is no exception, that party lines evaporate when the veteran is involved. The success I have on behalf of veterans' legislation depends, not on opposition to their demands, not on political differences, but on the available resources of the Canadian people which are allocated on a priority basis. Happily the

Canadian people have placed the veterans' needs at a reasonably high level.

There has been tremendous growth in veterans' benefits over the past few years. I am proud of this fact, and grateful at the same time for the recognition by this government of its responsibilities along this line. The nature and direction of programs and legislation designed and administered by this government demonstrate that our efforts are rightly directed toward those we seek to serve, the Canadian people, and, in this particular case, the Canadian veterans.

When they speak, our veterans do so eloquently and responsibly, certainly not from a politically partisan viewpoint, but more in the role of advisers and guides to those who frame and administer legislation. They have always kept the welfare of Canada in the forefront of their aims, while working for the proper care of all who served their country in time of war. Their knowledgeable expression of the hopes and aspirations of veterans has been met, by way of return, by willingness on the part of this government to listen and to assist whenever possible. As a Canadian I feel this is the way it should be. I know also that my colleagues have this same sense of responsibility, all share this firm desire to provide a tangible expression of national gratitude tempered only by our country's ability to pay. The effect of representations to my department, and the efforts of the dedicated men and women of my portfolio have resulted in a comprehensive program of legislation for veterans that not only equals but surpasses in a number of cases any country in the world.

This bill will enhance the lifestyle, augment the income, and generally improve the situation of a great number of deserving Canadians. We have many responsibilities. Some of these deal with the economy, others with the preservation of our Confederation. The one before us today is our responsibility for the well-being of a very special segment of our society. I am pleased that parliament so readily accepts that responsibility toward Canada's veterans.

Mr. William Knowles (Norfolk-Haldimand): This is a moment in the House of Commons, Mr. Speaker, that we have awaited for two, almost three years. We have been pressing the minister and the cabinet to give us this moment in the House of Commons, to give speedy passage to the bill before us, Bill C-58.

I want to compliment the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. MacDonald) and his staff for producing the legislation we are about to pass here in the House. This gives me an opportunity to say a special word about those loyal public servants in the Department of Veterans Affairs who labour hard and long to help those who have given so much of themselves, who kicked great holes in their lives when they volunteered for the service of their country. Some came back, as the minister said, broken men, and certainly broken lives, and this is only a small way that we have of recognizing their great contribution to this country.

As I began to say a moment ago, the staff in the department have always been most co-operative with all members of this