

Mr. Cullen: Madam Speaker, I have a question for the minister responsible for veterans affairs. At one time or another every member in this House has dealt with veterans' concerns and the latest one, which has been a continuing one for some time, is with respect to the length of time it takes to get a hearing before the Pension Commission or the War Veterans Allowance Board. This is not a knock at Dr. Solomon, Mr. Jutras or Don Thomson, all of whom are working hard and who have a good group working with them. But there must be some obvious bottleneck because of the length of time it takes to be heard. As a member of Parliament one hesitates to recommend to a veteran that he go through the appeal procedure, since it takes so long.

Would the minister give some consideration to having an investigation conducted to ascertain just where the bottlenecks are occurring? Do these delays occur with respect to obtaining the medical reports or are they taking too long in getting out the decision? Frankly, can the minister find out why it is that veterans are discouraged from filing applications for relief?

Hon. J. Gilles Lamontagne (Minister of National Defence): Madam Speaker, I am sorry that I have a bad voice this morning; I probably need a spray of some kind!

An hon. Member: As long as it isn't Agent Orange!

Mr. Lamontagne: Madam Speaker, very briefly, I had a meeting yesterday with Dr. Solomon, the president of the Pension Commission. We tried to find out exactly where there were delays. I can assure the hon. member that the backlog will most likely be eliminated within six or eight months.

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CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS

CN EXPRESS OFFICES—LEVEL OF SERVICE IN MARITIME CENTRES

Mr. Mel Gass (Malpeque): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Transport. It is a follow-up to my question of last Friday regarding the meeting which was to take place this week between Dr. Bandeen of CNR and the minister to consider proposals with regard to the retention of CN Express offices in Charlottetown and other maritime centres. I have been informed that the meeting took place yesterday. My question to the minister is: will he now tell this House if the Express offices in Charlottetown and some other maritime centres will remain open and what level of service can be expected?

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, at the request, indeed, of many members, and following a vote in the Standing Committee on Transport of the House of Commons, I asked CN to review the situation. They have. I met Mr. Bandeen yesterday for a couple of hours and we went through the entire application of the program with which CN Express is involved. As the hon. member knows, workers who will be laid off will be protected. Some 90 per

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cent of them will be relocated, retrained or pre-pensioned. Great efforts are being made to protect the interests of the communities affected. Agreements and contracts are being signed with truckers. In Sydney, for example, there are 28 truckers and in Amherst ten. In all these efforts I think CN Express is showing great sensitivity in what they are doing.

Of course, a number of municipalities and communities are hurt, Sydney and Charlottetown being two. After these discussions we decided to do something special for Charlottetown, since the only terminal on the island is located there. We also decided to do something special for Sydney, in view of events which have taken place there in recent months leading to a great unemployment situation. So in these two places the terminals will be maintained, but at a reduced level of employment. We have developed a formula for each community, which will be announced on Monday.

Mr. Gass: Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the minister how many of the 41 employees in Charlottetown will be allowed to retain their jobs.

Mr. Pepin: That is what will be revealed on Monday when we disclose the formula which will be used in the two localities, Charlottetown and Sydney.

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NATIONAL VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS

INQUIRY WHETHER GOVERNMENT REPRESENTED AT OTTAWA CONFERENCE

Hon. Walter Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Secretary of State, who I understand is attending the National Voluntary Organizations' meeting today in Ottawa. Can the minister confirm whether that is so, how many of his colleagues will be going with him, and who they are?

Hon. Francis Fox (Secretary of State and Minister of Communications): Madam Speaker, I am delighted to have the opportunity to respond to the hon. member's question. I thank him for putting it, since I understand there was a motion under Standing Order 43 put earlier this morning which was perhaps misleading. I would like to put the facts before the House.

Basically, the government and the NVO consultation is to take place this afternoon from lunchtime until approximately 4.30. The Minister of National Health and Welfare, the Minister of State for Multiculturalism, the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, the Leader of the Government in the Senate, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Solicitor General and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment will be attending this afternoon. There will also be a number of senior officials from the government participating in this meeting with the NVO. I will be addressing the group myself tomorrow at lunchtime. I would be delighted if the hon. member would attend to listen to the remarks I have to make at that time.