

groups, veterans' widows and orphans are dealt with under the current legislation. One of the good things is that the Bill gives veterans access to the legal assistance which they need in order to initiate appeals to the War Veterans Allowance Board, giving war veterans allowance recipients some of the resources available to veterans disability pensioners. The Bill includes a number of housekeeping measures which amend the Act in order to initiate the action which will integrate the War Veterans Allowance Program with the Old Age Security Program for all veterans over 65, and to do this by 1986.

The Minister's announcement of this legislation was coupled with an announcement that the Aging Veterans Program was to be made available to a larger number of veterans, and that some additional types of costs would be covered under the program. This is commendable, but we had expected considerably more. We expected to see some attention to the issue of eligibility for war veterans allowance for those who volunteered to serve their country but were not sent overseas. We hoped that the Minister would finally take action which would have permitted those needy Canadian veterans living outside the country to apply for war veterans allowance without incurring the expense of returning to Canada for a token 12 months. Those who can afford to come back to Canada for 12 months usually do not need the war veterans allowance as badly as those who cannot afford to come home for the year. We believed the Minister would remain true to his promise to increase the interest income deduction for veterans so that they would be able to save what they can without losing part of their allowance as a consequence.

● (1550)

This legislation does not accomplish any of these things. The Minister has made much of the fact that Bill C-39 will finally rectify an injustice which the Government formally recognized but did little about in 1980. Veterans under age 65, both married and single, have been receiving substantially less under the War Veterans Allowance Program than have their comrades who are over 65. In 1980, the Government decided to reduce the shortfall, which amounted to over \$1,000 per year for married recipients, by the princely amount of \$12 per month for these veterans each year for seven years. Now, after requiring these veterans to suffer through five years of these paltry increases, and a full year after the Minister promised to eliminate the shortfall, the Government has seen fit to do what should have been done in the first place—bring the WVA ceiling for veterans under age 65 to the same level as that which applies to their comrades over 65.

We have been calling upon the Minister for three full months to clarify his policy in regard to the GIS supplement increase. He has been unable to give a straightforward answer in the House or in committee. Now, less than a month before the first GIS increase of \$25 is to be put in place, the Minister has finally announced his plans to pass on this increase to single veterans.

Many of the amendments to the War Veterans Allowance Act contained in this Bill are intended to make the provisions

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of the Act more equitable. One will reinstate the right of a widow to an allowance if a second marriage breaks down, without concern for the length of the second marriage or the reason for the termination. This is a commendable initiative on the part of the Minister. Traditional family structures are being challenged in our society and, as unfortunate as that trend may be, it is imperative that it be recognized and provision made for its victims.

A question arises with respect to this aspect of the legislation. We would like the assurance of the Minister that all veterans' widows will be eligible to take advantage of this provision, regardless of when a second marriage took place or was dissolved. In other words, we would like to know that those veterans' widows who are currently ineligible for reinstatement of their allowance because of the circumstances associated with the termination of the second marriage, will be eligible for reinstatement of their benefits on the day on which the Act comes into force.

The Bill provides, in addition to its duties under the Pension Act, that the Bureau of Pensions Advocates shall provide a counselling service and assistance to applicants for allowances and recipients with respect to appeals to the War Veterans Allowance Board. The Minister has recognized that WVA recipients are by definition unable to afford their own legal counsel in order to undertake appeals to the board. There is no indication that he has taken into account the fact that the Bureau of Pensions Advocates is encountering great difficulty in fulfilling its obligations to disabled pensioners who have been its clients in the past. To add to the mandate of the bureau, while at the same time failing to increase its resources, will result in the same sort of backlogs in the allowance appeals system as veterans are currently encountering in the pension appeal system.

The Minister will know that this matter has been raised in committee. The representative of the Bureau of Pensions Advocates was unable to indicate that the resources of the bureau had been increased. The Minister must ensure that neither disability pensioners nor WVA recipients are forced to wait months until their claims are adjudicated.

Another provision of the Bill will make it possible for a couple forced to reside apart by circumstances such as the need for hospitalization to receive WVA at twice the single rate. In fact, the Minister made public reference to the fact that he had implemented this very reasonable policy as long ago as May, 1983. Now he has introduced the legislation to put it in place. What has been the policy over this period and under what authority has the Minister been acting, one might ask?

Another provision in the Bill removes all reference in the Act to the level of interest income which can be earned by a recipient without a reduction in his allowance. Yet, in May, 1983, in speaking to the Pacific Command of the Royal Canadian Legion, the Minister stated that the proposal for an increase in the amount of allowable interest income was under close scrutiny. More recently, on March 14, 1984, the Minister