

that we will be able to do something for the widows whom I have just mentioned in connection with my reference to recommendation 106. Then, when we have done all that, I hope the government will reconsider the amounts mentioned in the announcement of December 2 by the minister and that the increases in pension rates and in the war veterans allowance will be much larger than he proposed. I hope also, that instead of our veterans and their dependants having to wait until April, 1971, the increases granted by Parliament will be made retroactive at least to April, 1970. Surely, we should do nothing less.

• (4:50 p.m.)

[Translation]

Mr. Gilbert Rondeau (Shefford): Mr. Speaker, as all those who have spoken before me, I am happy that the House gives consideration to the second reading of Bill C-203 presented by the hon. Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Dubé) on December 2, 1970, which had been expected for a long time.

As other hon. members have already said, this bill is very valuable because it brings forth amendments that should have been made long ago.

However, the first reproach that we must make is that the amendments to the Pension Act and the Civilian War Pensions and Allowances Act should be in force, as the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) has just said, much earlier than April 1, 1971, not only because of the increased benefits to veterans, but also because of the improved method of assessing their disabilities.

This bill comes too late, for thousands of veterans have suffered in the past from the inadequacy of pensions, taking services rendered by them into consideration.

Generally speaking, the bill provides a 10 per cent increase in the amount of pensions. It also provides a special pension for Hong Kong veterans and the establishment of a Review Board, which, in my opinion, is very important. But here again the 10 per cent increase and the establishment of a Review Board can have very different consequences for certain veterans, since everything depends on the assessment of their disabilities.

In fact, if the veteran's pension is raised by 10 per cent while the assessment of his disability is carried on a stricter basis, this 10 per cent increase will not improve the lot of those who are now entitled to a pension which is not commensurate to the services rendered to the nation.

Mr. Speaker, I have in mind several cases involving veterans. In one case, the Pension Commission has delayed for four years its decision to allow a veteran to undergo surgical operations. That decision was taken only six months ago. Four years ago, the Commission had deemed these operations unnecessary and had sent the veteran back home on the grounds that his pain was all in his mind. However, the Commission has recently ruled

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that this pensioner's sufferings were nothing far from imaginary and this fellow was given permission to be operated on absolutely free of charge to him.

Assessing the veteran's disability is the core of the problem. If in the future the criteria for assessing disability are made more rigid, then the 10 per cent increase allowed today will soon be absorbed.

It will be objected that Bill C-203 provides for the setting up of a five-member Pension Review Board. I trust that this body will be able to make the necessary humanitarian rulings but, on the other hand, we all know very well that the extent of the adjudication powers of the Pension Review Board will only go so far as the regulations applied by the department will allow.

Actually, if the department shows too much rigidity in its application of basic criteria for assessing the case of certain pensioners, the Board will have to follow those recommendations, those basic rules before deciding which of the veteran or the Pension Commission is right.

That is why the general principle of the bill is good. We finally have the pleasure of acknowledging that fact. However, time will tell whether review boards are ghost committees much too restricted in their decisions. We are aware of the work of review boards in other fields, in other departments. We know very well that to be really effective a review board must sometimes overthrow the decisions of officials but, on the other hand, it must obey the instructions, rules, recommendations of the department. If the department is too strict when it determines the fundamental criteria to evaluate possible disabilities of veterans, the bill now before us will not be enough. But we congratulate the minister for finally tabling the bill in the House. All admit it seeks to help war veterans.

[English]

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

SUBJECT MATTER OF QUESTIONS TO BE DEBATED

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 40, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: The hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. MacInnis)—Criminal Code—suggested removal of abortion provisions; the hon. member for St. John's West (Mr. Carter)—regional economic expansion—Argentina, Newfoundland—report on effects of closing of United States naval station and, the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath)—regional economic expansion—Montreal—applications by city under amended Incentives Act.

It being five o'clock, the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business, as listed on today's Order Paper, namely, notices of motions and public bills.