

Pension Act and Other Acts

House that the revision will be completed at the earliest possible moment.

I apologize to the House for directing my attention almost totally to the notes with which I was provided, but hon. members will realize that this is quite a complex matter with which I am still trying to become familiar.

Mr. Baldwin: I rise on a point of order only to point out to Your Honour and the House that members of our party who are particularly interested in this matter are unavoidably absent today, in the belief that the previous measure would have taken a little longer than it did. However, we are quite happy to let the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), who will be speaking for his party, precede us if it is understood—we are not asking for an order to be made—that members of our party will be allowed to speak on Tuesday after the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre has completed his remarks.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I find myself in the position of having to say a few complimentary words in at least two directions. First of all, I am grateful to my friend, the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin), for allowing me to speak ahead of a representative of the official opposition. I can understand the absence of the several members of that party who would be speaking on this matter, since they did not expect it to be reached this soon, but I dare to suggest that the views I shall express are probably the views that they would express if they were here this afternoon.

• (1550)

The other pleasant word I want to offer is to suggest to the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Laing) that if the speech he made this afternoon is—and I believe it is—a sample of the attitude he takes toward veterans affairs, he ought to reconsider his decision about not running again.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I grant that as a Liberal he might have trouble getting elected in Vancouver South, but let us assume he could get elected somewhere, and if the Liberals were still in power I would hope he might continue in his position as Minister of Veterans Affairs. I say that, Mr. Speaker, because when suddenly it became obvious that this bill was going to be reached this afternoon I made some quick notes about the points I wanted to make and the questions I wanted to ask. The minister dealt with each one of them, and not only dealt with them but dealt with them very satisfactorily. That is why I wish he were not retiring.

I suppose, Mr. Speaker, that this is an area where it is not unusual for there to be this all-party approach, because it is true that in the veterans affairs committee we seem to have less partisanship than in almost any committee of the House. We meet in that committee, some members as veterans and some of us not, deeply conscious of our debt to those who have served us in a number of wars, and it is our supreme desire as members of the committee to see that the best possible deal is provided for our veterans.

[Mr. Laing.]

I said, Mr. Speaker, that I had made a few notes about questions which the minister has answered already. But even so, may I underline the points that have now been made clear. I think the most important thing he said in his few remarks was that the cost of living escalator being provided by this legislation is not a substitute for an adjustment in the basic rate of pensions. I trust that applies to all pensions and allowances, those under the Pension Act, under the War Veterans Allowance Act and under the other pieces of veterans legislation. As the minister must know, because there have been some press releases already from veterans organizations, the notion that this 3.6 per cent increase might be what the minister has been talking about lately when he has referred to possible increases in veterans pensions has been very annoying, and veterans have said that this is not good enough. They are absolutely right and the minister has answered that he agrees.

I said the same thing earlier to the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Munro), that the cost of living increase to be added to the basic \$80 pension must not be a substitute for increasing that basic \$80. I thank the Minister of Veterans Affairs for making it clear that the escalation, according to the cost of living, being provided in this piece of legislation is an extra and not something that is offered in substitution for an adjustment in the basic rates.

I trust that the review of the basic rates which is going on will be pursued diligently. I suppose that if the minister is going to stay with his determination not to run in the next election it means he does not have to go out on the campaign hustings. He can still be Minister of Veterans Affairs until the date of the next election, so he can stay in Ottawa and see to it that the department works hard on this question of basic rates.

I plead that when the department is discussing basic rates it should consider not only the disability rates under the Pension Act but also the basic rates set out in the War Veterans Allowance Act and the rates of various other allowances. The minister is moving his head to indicate that that is correct. Even though I seem to be spelling it out in full, Mr. Speaker, I think it is most important that it be spelled out. If the minister had not said what he did, we would be blasting him now. It is extremely good to see that these cost of living increases, to be made annually on a statutory basis, will not now or in the future be a substitute for an increase in the basic rates.

I still make the same comment about escalation in relation to this bill that I made in relation to the old age security pension. I still do not think it is good enough to escalate only according to the rise in the cost of living. That is better than no escalation at all. It is better than an escalation limited to 2 per cent. But I think our veterans in particular are entitled to share in the increased standard of living and that some day we will have to tie this escalation to a better formula than the rise in the cost of living.

A second note I made was to ask whether these increases would apply to all the pensions and allowances, and two I had in mind were the special incapacity allowance and the treatment allowance. By mental telepathy, or perhaps just by coincidence, the minister mentioned both of them and underlined the fact that what is being pro-