

War Veterans Allowance Act

customary in the course of our lives and which these veterans, having reached a certain age, are no longer able to do alone. Consequently, the \$600 per year for transportation will certainly be very useful. Moreover, we will improve on present services, namely home care, out-patient care and institutional care.

All things considered, expanding the Aging Veterans Program will cost about \$101 million. This is a very substantial amount, but I believe that all the Hon. Members will recognize that such expenditures are fully justified, not only in human terms, but also in terms of financial responsibility for the Government of Canada.

What are the alternatives to the Aging Veterans Program? In 1981, 67,000 veterans were over 76 years of age. This figure will double within the next few years. You do not have to be an expert in gerontology to understand that many of these people are not as self-sufficient as they used to be. There is also no doubt that the need for chronic care beds will increase dramatically during the next fifteen years. We believe that, with respect to the care given to older people, there is too much emphasis placed on institutional care in the health and social service field and not enough on the services which can be provided to these people in their own homes. I believe that, in due course, we shall have to shift the emphasis to home services away from institutional care.

Mr. Speaker, expanding the Aging Veterans Program also offers another avenue which will be much less costly for the taxpayers. Government officials have estimated that, in 1991, \$57 billion will be spent under the Aging Veterans Program to provide assistance to about 14,000 veterans. In other words, if the same amount were used to help veterans in hospitals, we would be able to help only 1,200 of them, while we shall be able, under this new program, to provide assistance, not to 1,200, but to 14,000.

Mr. Speaker, over and above the financial benefits provided by the program for the Government and the Canadian public, I believe that older people much prefer to be helped in providing for their own needs under the program we are proposing today.

During the debates on the Canada Health Act, a large number of Members of Parliament from both sides of the House have urged the Government to consider new methods and approaches to the whole issue of health care. The high cost of hospitalization has often been mentioned throughout the debates. Federal and provincial authorities were urged to find alternatives. In my opinion, it can be said the Department of Veterans Affairs has indeed been a leader in that field. The Aging Veterans Program meets their obvious needs, as it does those of elderly Canadians as a whole.

Mr. Speaker, I am sincerely convinced that the people who are concerned about the aging Canadian population and who are already making plans for the day when the majority of Canadians will be over 60 or 65 years old will review with interest and attention the results of that program administered

by the Department of Veterans Affairs. Veterans will grow older faster than the rest of Canadians. By helping them today, we are preparing ourselves to help other Canadians, and a good many of our existing social programs were set up in the first place to help veterans and their families. I think that the Aging Veterans Program is in keeping with that tradition, and what we want to do today for those veterans is what we shall be doing tomorrow for all Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, the program I have just described is probably the last of a long series of measures Canada will have to take to fulfil its commitment towards veterans and their dependents. Our country looked after its veterans when they returned from the war zone. It cared for their war wounds. It helped them reintegrate civilian life, it gave them support when they were raising their families. Today, those veterans and spouses in many cases are or will soon be senior citizens. Canada has an opportunity to help them at the end of their lives. We owe them that much, it is a challenge we should meet.

Mr. Speaker, the War Veteran's Charter is a document that was prepared prudently by members from all parties in this House. It was supported from all sides. I am convinced the House will be happy to enact proposals that will add a noble chapter that will do credit to all members in this House, because I am confident they will unanimously support the bill.

● (1540)

[*English*]

Hon. Allan B. McKinnon (Victoria): Mr. Speaker, I am somewhat puzzled as to how the House can get this Bill through this afternoon. We shared time on the two Bills that were here, but we had not foreseen that the NDP would waste so much time getting the Hon. Member for Spadina (Mr. Heap) thrown out of the House on a trumped up case of using unparliamentary language. That was time we could desperately use now to get this Bill through.

I would like to thank the Minister for his presentation of the facts about the Bill. No doubt his speech was prepared by senior departmental officers. Listening to it I found that it came through well and I believe some of the detail he has filled in will be useful to have on the record. Bill C-39 is the first piece of veterans legislation to be introduced by the current Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Bennett). It is a shame that his other duties have precluded him from being here to speak on the final veterans Bill which this Government will ever pass. Part of the Bill is niggling in its attitude and a lot has been left out. If we were trying to get this Bill through the House in the normal course with its being referred to committee, we would have had an opportunity to move many amendments that we would like to have made to it. But in the interest of getting half a loaf rather than none, we are willing to forgo that part of the proceedings.

This Bill includes a number of provisions which address serious inequities in the way in which veterans of different age