

Veterans Affairs

veterans. As of last year there were some 2,700 eligible and qualified veterans still serving in the Canadian forces.

It is not generally known that, until very recently, we were denied the benefits of the Veterans' Land Act. The Minister of Veterans Affairs required certification that we would serve to retirement in the location where application was made. The Minister of National Defence could not give any such guarantee and as a result the serving veterans could not build a home. Now many serving veterans are posted abroad to Europe or on peacekeeping duties or are serving far from their intended place of retirement. The firm opinion of the serving veteran is that there has been a deliberate breach of faith by the Minister of Veterans Affairs.

Recent casualties to Canadian forces members in Cyprus and Syria should serve to remind everyone of the nature of our commitment. No government should, in my opinion, be so unwise and shortsighted as to breach its commitments to those who served in war.

● (1630)

I have here a letter from the Canadian Fighter Pilots Association which reads in part as follows:

As a veteran of more than five years in the RCAF during World War II, I have maintained my qualifications to settle under the VLA. Now, as I reach my halcyon years, the need for financial assistance is just as real as it was in 1945.

It is apparent that this present profligate government is cheeseparing. VLA loans are not a give away program—such as LIP—but an investment of money with protected collateral.

Then he makes a reference to a nearby airport which will cost \$1.5 billion. He goes on to say:

Yes, Mr. Marshall, I would like to be involved and offer you support.

This is indicated in every letter, all of them dated within the last month. I have here a letter that was sent to the *Ottawa Citizen*, which reads:

I am a serving veteran, registered and eligible for VLA consideration. I am presently serving at Canadian Forces Base Edmonton (Namao). Because of my present posting I am unable to take advantage of the VLA act to purchase a home in my chosen place of retirement—

I think the article should be sent to every Main-Brace Club, Canadian Legion and Air Force Association across Canada.

Then he says that he is grateful for the efforts made. I am quoting these letters, Madam Speaker, because they tell the facts better than we can. If we told the facts, nobody would believe us. I have here another one which reads:

There must be many veterans like myself who, of necessity, have lived in urban areas since the war ended and have not been able, for one reason or another, to use the benefits provided by the act but who look forward to retiring to a small town area. If the act is cancelled, those dreams go up in smoke.

That veteran speaks about the changes that he wants in the act, and says that he referred his proposals to his member of parliament who sits on the other side and is aware of them. Here I have just one paragraph of a letter from someone in Saint-John, New Brunswick. He writes as follows:

As a certificate-holding veteran I have been most frustrated in trying to build a home under the VLA. At this point I own a lot of 18,000 square feet on which I had hoped to build but there is such a difference in the cost of construction and in the allowable ceiling that I am unable to take advantage of the plan.

The cost of construction in this region is very high and I cannot see building the house I want and require for less than \$50,000—which is over and above the cost of the lot already paid for—which, incidentally, cost \$7,000.

The lot cost \$7,000 so how can he build a home with \$15,400 after he had paid \$7,000 for the lot? I have many

[Mr. Marshall.]

more letters, which I am picking at random, all supporting that stand and all asking the government to prolong the act, to increase the loan ceiling and to overcome the many inequities. The minister indicated in committee that he had an interdepartmental committee working on a new housing program for veterans. This committee must be progressing and I hope the minister will introduce its report before these two days are over. I had hoped he would have done it yesterday, because the government wants to use the time today and tomorrow for other legislation.

The other thing at which I am surprised is the secrecy involved here. We have always gone along with bills which benefit veterans. We in the veterans committee are known for non-partisanship. Last year I put forward a motion for the production of papers, asking for a copy of all material resulting from the first meeting of the VLA senior management team convened by the director general of Veterans Land Administration in Ottawa which took place from March 26 to March 29, 1973. I asked for, first, operational plans in the periods before and after the 31 March, 1974, deadline for new loan applications, and second, further implementation of management by objectives as the VLA style of management. So somebody must have been considering it over a long period, and for some reason or other the documentation was considered secret or classified and I was denied it. So I put the notice of motion on the order paper again this year and I hope that we will see it tabled.

The Veterans Land Administration consists of 400 to 500 dedicated experts in the housing area who are veterans. They are doing yeoman work, not only in handling accounts for veterans but also in giving advice and service to the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and many other departments. They will continue their services until 1980. So why phase out this act when so much can be done? Under part II of the act, a veteran does not have to be qualified and he can build on a city-size lot. But how can he do it if he can only borrow \$18,000 and has to make a downpayment of \$2,600? Let us not lose these people; let us continue to serve our veterans, who number 20,000. They are settled and happy and are allowed to improve their homes by having their loans increased periodically. Why should we deny them that?

I could refer to many hundreds of letters and phone calls which I have received, directly regarding the feelings of many more veterans than I thought were concerned. I am confirmed in my thinking that there are enough veterans across this country who demand a change in the government's intention to phase out the act. Many of my letters are copies of those submitted to the minister and to the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), and copies of many of those sent to me have been sent to other members of parliament, some of them sitting on the other side. If we believe in the democratic system, if we believe that our government and the members of this House are truly representative of the people, then we can do nothing less than support this motion.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Marshall: I say to the government opposite that if they have an ounce of Canadianism in their souls, if they