

qualified service officer personnel of the Department of Veterans Affairs in order more effectively to serve the populations living in those regions.

I have submitted questions from time to time to the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. MacDonald) and he has acknowledged them positively, saying that a decision is just around the corner and that if I would rest my soul in patience, the announcement would be made. When the parliamentary secretary responded in a similar debate of this kind almost a year ago, he indicated that the decision was about to be made.

I regret that neither the minister nor his parliamentary secretary are present, but I trust that the spokesman who is representing the government tonight will be able to answer in specific terms to two questions. First of all, will the government proceed with this policy which will provide on the spot advisory and counselling services to the veterans, and will one of these offices be located Brandon; and second, when will the program be initiated?

The reason I have become involved in the matter is a letter that was circulated from the regional office of the Department of Veterans Affairs in the city of Winnipeg which serves Thunder Bay, from the area welfare supervisor on February 10, 1976. It was directed to the service officer of the Royal Canadian Legion in Brandon, Mr. John Heming. It reads:

Dear Mr. Heming:

Due to budgetary cutbacks our country travel has been curtailed until the beginning of the new fiscal year—April, 1976.

I apologize for the inconvenience this will create to veterans in the area, but ask for your co-operation in forwarding full particulars of any veterans problems in your area with which I may be of assistance. Please include in your referrals full name, address, regimental number and nature of problem.

I am looking forward to seeing you in April.

This letter is dated February, so I think he will agree that there was not too much service given at that time to a veteran population which is represented by almost 5,000 ex-service personnel in the Westman region who are active members of the Royal Canadian Legion. Based on percentage figures, that means that there must be a veteran population of over 15,000 because those areas of the country made a great contribution to enlistments in both World War I and World War II.

As a result of this letter the branches of the Royal Canadian Legion in the area conducted a write-in campaign and letters flowed into me and to the minister in great numbers. It was on the basis of this write-in campaign that the minister was persuaded, I am sure, that this was a good policy and an urgently needed one. The situation was reinforced by a statement of Mr. Bob Adams, the director general of veterans services, located here in Ottawa, in an article in the *Legionnaire*, the official organ of the Canadian Legion, when he indicated that this program was being contemplated and that it was going to be a storefront operation with as little in the way of support staff as possible and it would bring uniformity

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into the disbursement of the program's goodies, as Adams said, "Standards of counselling and social welfare will be set here in Ottawa" he said, and they will be uniform across the country.

● (2250)

I raised the question on May 31, and again the Minister of Veterans Affairs said:

The study I initiated at that time in reference to this question is still under way. Brandon is under study at the present time. As far as giving the hon. member a definite date, I prefer not to do so now.

Another two months have passed, and I hope tonight that the spokesman will be able to indicate some specifics in this regard. It is much less expensive than the travelling involved and the long distance telephone calls involved. It is a program which is a part of the decentralization emphasis which has been announced by the minister.

We have the grandiose plan of taking the department to Prince Edward Island. I think even greater priority is demanded by the issue which has been brought forward in quite specific terms in hundreds of letters which have come from the veterans of the Westman area. The legion service officers are trying to fill in to the best of their ability. They have initiated an operation service, and they are to be congratulated for filling the gap which has to be filled. It is a vacuum of service which has to be met and I trust—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier):** Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. gentleman, but his allotted time has expired.

**Mr. Dinsdale:** I am sure the spokesman will give us a positive response tonight.

**Mr. Paul E. McRae (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Health and Welfare):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member presents the problem very well. As the hon. member is aware, the minister has indicated that a review of the organization of the department is under way with the hope of improving service. The number of veteran clients is increasing. Those of us who are veterans are getting older and are going to require more services, so there is no question that there will be a need. The problem is the freeze on manpower but, as the hon. member has indicated, one way of improving service is to increase the number of offices. In order to improve service, some services in those offices must be combined.

The study is still under way. The data is not all in. I cannot give a date, but the study is under way, and there is no question that Brandon and Thunder Bay are two centres where this kind of service is necessary. One of the pressures will be the need for increased service. We all appreciate that. In my visits to veterans hospitals I find that the numbers are increas-