

*Veterans Affairs*

There are people who tend to say that since not many veterans are involved, it does not matter about them. In other words, it is all right to be unjust to a few. My view is that it is not all right to be unjust even to one person. All too frequently people suffering from this bureaucratic syndrome treat other people as statistics. We have heard it quoted ad nauseam that there are not very many qualified veterans who are applying any more, and also that the war in which they took part happened a long time ago, the war which qualified them for benefits under the act. "So there are two factors in our favour," the bureaucrat says, "one is that it happened a long time ago and the memory of it is receding." A whole new generation has grown up that does not know what we are talking about. No doubt they look on us who take part in this debate as a bunch of old crocks talking about ancient history.

The second view of the bureaucrat is that only a few veterans are applying, so it does not matter how unjust one is to just a few, to their way of thinking. This is the statistical approach to what is right and wrong.

**Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton):** The old numbers game.

**Mr. MacLean:** I do not think that that is valid, and I do not think the minister thinks that way either.

**Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton):** He is blushing.

**Mr. MacLean:** I hope that the minister will be able to resist this bureaucratic approach. These people think that since there are only a few involved, it is inconvenient for the bureaucracy to have a set up that is shrinking. Bureaucracy must per se expand because one cannot build an empire with an establishment that is contracting. Therefore this is against the philosophy of the bureaucratic mind. They say, "It is inconvenient, so let us brush it under the rug, and perhaps next year, or some other time, we will justify it by saying that we will grant similar benefits under some other department of government." That is not good enough so far as I am concerned.

The fact of the matter is that the reason given that veterans are disqualified from these benefits simply because they did not establish their qualification in time is not a valid one. The reason they were late is not germane. Some of them perhaps are continuing to serve in the permanent forces and did not know where they would want to live permanently after they had completed their service. There could be one hundred reasons. That is not the point.

The point is that under the terms of the act there are still a few veterans who are just as qualified for these benefits as was the first veteran who applied when the act first came into force. It is the responsibility of all of us, and of the government in particular, to ensure that the contract with the veterans is kept, not only for the bulk of them, not only for the ones who applied early, but for everyone down to the last veteran who qualifies for this benefit, even if it is 50 years later. Time should not be a deciding factor in this. Therefore I hope that the minister will see fit to cut out this time limit entirely.

**Mr. Bert Hargrave (Medicine Hat):** Madam Speaker, may I first of all associate myself with some considerable pleasure with the remarks so ably presented on this reso-

lution by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) and the hon. member for Humber-St. Georg's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall).

At the risk of repeating some of the argument in support of the resolution let me relate this important issue to some of the complaints and needs of veterans and their families in my constituency of Medicine Hat. I know that the minister and his staff feel that after nearly 30 years there should no longer be a necessity for a further extension of VLA after March, 1975, and the earlier qualification deadline in 1968. In this regard I appreciate the remarks that the minister made in response to my comments and questions at the recent meeting of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs when we discussed the estimates of that department.

I want to say to the minister that there are still veterans in my constituency who do have reasons for not having become properly qualified back in 1968, and I admit that some of the reasons seem to be obscure. I can only say that those few should still be allowed to qualify, and they have earned that right as genuine war veterans. Perhaps the only reason I can suggest is that I know most of them personally.

● (2100)

The fact that they want to use this last VLA opportunity for a retirement home should not be held against them, or used as a reason for hastening the end of what has been a fine program for veterans. I know about this, Madam Speaker, because it has been my privilege to have had a VLA contract which was a substantial help to me over the years. That is why I suggest that the few remaining veterans of whom I speak should be entitled to have their records examined so that they can qualify. There are relatively few veterans left who could qualify under the 1968 terms, and perhaps a solution would be for them to be considered on an individual and personal basis by the minister himself.

In his speech today the minister threw out the suggestion that he may be bringing in a separate housing policy for veterans in lieu of the soon to be phased out VLA program. Until such a suggestion becomes official policy it seems only common sense and decent justice to insist that the present VLA policy and the extension of the 1968 qualification date be continued over an indefinite period.

If a special housing policy is pursued for veterans I sincerely hope and trust that the current almost complete lack of mortgage money is recognized and accounted for in such a proposed policy.

I should like to give one specific example from my constituency of a need for some form of VLA continued assistance. The veteran concerned is in the commercial trucking industry and wishes to erect a suitable building for his trucks—both as a shelter and as a shop—to be located on a small acreage. This, to me, is a perfectly legitimate use of his rights as a veteran, but I believe at the moment he is not being considered.

In the Medicine Hat constituency there are seven Royal Canadian Legion branches. These are located in the various areas and include Bow Island, Redcliff, Taber, Vauxhall, Foremost and Raymond, and my own in Medicine Hat, No. 17 Robertson Memorial Branch. In addition, the