

Government Orders

Mr. Jesse Flis (Parkdale—High Park): Madam Speaker, I am pleased that the Minister of Veterans Affairs has taken part in this debate.

Like him, I have talked to many veterans in my riding of Parkdale—High Park. Most of the ones I spoke to told me to come to Ottawa today to take part in this debate, but to fight for avoiding participating in any military action.

The advice they are giving me is that the sanctions should be given more time to work, that we should explore further diplomatic channels, but at all costs avoid going to war, I think for the very reasons the minister mentioned. They were in war. They shed blood. They lost their colleagues, so they know what war is all about.

The minister's government deals and rules a lot and makes many decisions based on polls. I would like to ask the minister whether his department or he himself has taken polls across Canada among our veterans, and what percentage urged the government to allow sanctions more time to work and other diplomacy, as opposed to military action.

There is a second question I would like to pose to him. He heard our leader make an amendment, to the government motion, because clearly as the resolution states it does commit our troops to an offensive role as of midnight tonight, January 15.

I am wondering if he could give reasons whether he will support the official opposition amendment. If not, would he explain why he could not support the amendment? With the amendment we might be able to support the government motion but, if the government refuses to accept our amendment, there is no way that our party can give the government *carte blanche* to commit our troops as of midnight tonight to be in an offensive mode versus the defensive mode they are in now.

Mr. Merrithew: Madam Speaker, on the first question the hon. member asked regarding whether or not we have taken polls, I should point out that this government—and I am not trying to be light-hearted here—certainly does not govern by polls. Perhaps we should, but we do not do that.

The important thing here is that I have talked to the leadership of the veterans groups. In fact I talked to them even as late as today. While I cannot speak for

every single member of those groups, they do know the importance of standing the ground, standing on principle, and standing up for what they fought for and what their comrades died for, that is world order and a cessation of brutal aggression anywhere it happens around the world. They are our strongest defenders of peace and of world order. They support the United Nations and they support generally the United Nations efforts, and they have indicated that to our government in writing.

I would like to say, although I am not going to quote exactly the wording, that they are the most thoughtful people in the world when it comes to war because they know the brutality. They have seen it. They have felt it. They have heard it. They have tasted it. Therefore I treat their views with a great deal of respect.

The hon. member's second question, was do we support his leader's amendment as proposed earlier today in the debate? Obviously midnight tonight—and I made this very clear—has been a deadline that has been known for a long period of time. I have never treated lightly the importance of this deadline to the Canadian people or to the 30-country coalition that has staked a great deal on resolution 678 and indeed the other 11 resolutions of the Security Council of the United Nations.

I support personally what the United Nations is doing. Without it, where will this all end? Do we reward aggression? Do we say to Saddam Hussein: "You have done well; continue and go on"? Or, do we do something and provide a deadline and seek the support of other member nations around the world, which has been done, and say: "Look, enough is enough. This is the time and this must stop, and here is what must happen"? It is a very simple thing. They must clear out of the country they have conquered, the country they have annexed.

I think that is a fair thing. I support that view and I support the United Nations.

Mr. Guy H. Arseneault (Restigouche—Chaleur): Madam Speaker, I have just a few points. I would like to congratulate the minister on his speech. Coming from my home province, I am very proud to have him here as a minister speaking on this very serious issue. Although we belong to different parties and we have a different point of view, I think it is important that we all have a chance to state our point of view.