

Veterans Affairs

Mr. Cossitt: May I then withdraw the quorum call. I realize that the hon. member for London East (Mr. Turner), the Minister of Labour (Mr. Regan), the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Pinard), and numerous others, darted in to their seats after I called quorum. But according to what our learned friend, the member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), who is an authority on the House rules, has said, they are permitted to do that. So, of course, I will withdraw my quorum call. I was simply trying to point out that often there are very few members in attendance in the House. Here comes another gentleman.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): I do not know whether it is necessary to recognize the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Pinard) to pursue the matter. I have checked Beauchesne and I find that the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) appears to be correct. My recollection is that the last time a quorum was called in the House under similar circumstances the Chair called on the Assistant Clerk to identify every member who was present at the time when the Chair called for that count to be made. The Chair cannot check the situation retroactively. I would then become a judge as to whether each and every individual member were here. I would have to start a count now through the offices of the Assistant Clerk. Unless there are other members, or the President of the Privy Council who a moment ago seemed to be rising on a point of order, wishing to speak, the advice of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre is accepted.

Mr. Knowles: There are now 30 members in the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): At this moment, the Chair sees a quorum.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dionne (Chicoutimi): Mr. Speaker, may I suggest that Charlottetown can provide headquarters with all it needs to continue to give adequate service to Canadian veterans and their dependants. Charlottetown was chosen because it has administrative support and clerical workers who can easily be trained and assigned to the various divisions of the department and organizations. It has a regional university which will train competent professionals for us and some of its residents are bilingual. Another factor which is essential to the proper operation of a head office with district offices throughout Canada is an advanced network of communications and transport, something Charlottetown has. Moreover, employees will be able to rent adequate lodgings at reasonable prices on the island, and should the need arise, others may be built.

The decentralization of the Department of Veterans Affairs brings many benefits to the city.

The strategic location at the limit of Charlottetown's commercial zone will bring an economic development whose need is strongly felt and will revitalize the retail shops in the area. The new headquarters building will improve the immediate vicinity—

[*English*]

An hon. Member: Read the rules.

An hon. Member: I don't need to read them, I know them.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): Order, please. The point of order which was raised on the quorum is, no doubt, of interest to all members. But if they want to discuss it they should rise on a point of order and seek the attention of the Chair. Otherwise, as a courtesy to the hon. member speaking, we should allow him to complete his remarks without interruptions.

[*Translation*]

I must say that it is the hon. member for Chicoutimi (Mr. Dionne) who has the floor.

Mr. Dionne (Chicoutimi): Thank you again, Mr. Speaker.

The new head office building will enhance the immediate area and the veterans affairs project will probably generate other development initiatives from the private sector. Some time ago, veterans affairs announced the plan to move gradually its head office staff to Charlottetown. Under that plan, all veterans affairs head office employees should be relocated in Charlottetown by 1983.

When the decision to move was announced, the Minister of Veterans Affairs guaranteed that the quality of services would not be reduced and that veterans would continue to receive before, during and after the move, the services of superior quality with which they have always been provided. The minister repeated that he was standing by that commitment and those same guarantees. The task force on the relocation of veterans affairs is responsible for planning and executing the move while at the same time maintaining the present quality of service. Obviously, the planners of the task force are convinced the client service will not be affected in any way during the move because otherwise that relocation would not be going ahead as it is at this time. To make sure the minister's commitment is met, it is important that the veterans affairs head office has a qualified staff to carry out its legislative and administrative mandate. That task will be carried out through the relocation of certain employees and the special training programs that have been put together to train the new employees replacing those who are not moving to Charlottetown.

An important question keeps coming back about the move, namely, what will be the social impact of this proposed move on the people of Charlottetown and Prince Edward Island? The move to Charlottetown will result in the relocation of a rather large number of employees and their families. Those civil servants will make new friends, join associations, send their kids to school, and their spouses will look for jobs. In other words, they will become part of the community and will start a new life.