

not know why previous Ministers of Veterans Affairs had such difficulty in resolving many of these simple problems.

While I support the intention of the motion and praise the work done by the Minister of Veterans Affairs, it does not mean that there are not other matters that must be addressed soon on behalf of veterans.

One matter which I want to raise specifically concerns an issue that defies logic. It is a policy dealing with Canadians who served overseas during the war and, at the termination of the war, elected to remain in the country in which they served rather than return to Canada. According to the legislation, before these veterans can become eligible for the War Veterans Allowance, they are required to reside in Canada for a 12-month period. These are people who made a great sacrifice to themselves and their families and volunteered to fight not only for Canada but on behalf of free people everywhere in the world. While serving in those countries they may have met their spouse, married in the country in which they served and raised families. Many of them now are at an age when they are infirm and need some extra financial assistance in order to lead as normal a life as possible.

The Department of Veterans Affairs has indicated that it is willing to give these people assistance but, before doing so, they must uproot themselves from their family and return to Canada for 12 months to receive the benefits under the various pieces of legislation for veterans. I, nor those veterans, understand the logic behind that policy. I know that the Minister is quite sympathetic to the problem facing these veterans. I believe it is time for action, but I also understand and appreciate that it involves a cost to the treasury.

I have proposed a suggestion to the Minister of Veterans Affairs. Canada is very generous to allied forces who are not Canadians but come to Canada and reside here for 10 years. After that 10-year period they become eligible for benefits under our veterans' legislation, quite properly so. I have suggested to the Minister that perhaps negotiations should take place with the United Kingdom and other European countries on the basis that we treat their veterans very generously in Canada and perhaps a reciprocal agreement with those Governments could be arranged to ensure that Canadian veterans living in those countries are treated as well as veterans who decide to live in Canada.

I congratulate the Hon. Member for Hull—Aylmer for giving us an opportunity to discuss this important matter. It deserves all the support that the motion calls for.

Mr. Dan McKenzie (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Veterans Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this debate because the motion moved by the Hon. Member for Hull—Aylmer (Mr. Isabelle) is entirely in keeping with the approach this Government has taken with respect to veterans.

The Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Hees) will probably go down as the most popular and effective Minister of Veterans Affairs that this country has ever seen. It has been a

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great pleasure and honour for me to have served as his parliamentary secretary.

When I visit Legions and Army and Navy units across the country, representing the Minister at Veterans Affairs functions, I hear nothing but the highest praise and respect for the Minister, particularly for the advanced legislation that he has brought forward over the last couple of years.

• (1850)

I am a life member of the Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans. In my Legion in Winnipeg, every time I visit, I am asked about my Minister. It is the same in the Charleswood Legion in my riding. They often comment on the Minister's advanced legislation.

The Minister of Veterans Affairs made two very important announcements when he took office. The first announcement was that veterans were very special Canadians and that they would be treated as such by the Department of Veterans Affairs and by the Government of Canada. Following this was a second announcement that the overriding policy at the Department of Veterans Affairs would be summarized in three words: courtesy, generosity and speed. Those statements were strongly endorsed by the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) and, indeed, by the entire Government. Since that time, I am confident all Hon. Members would agree, the Government has honoured the commitments given by the Minister of Veterans Affairs in September 1984.

It might appear easy today to say this is no big accomplishment. However, that was certainly not the case when we took office. Those of us who were here in the last Parliament can recall only too well how dreadful things had become at the Department of Veterans Affairs. Believe it or not, Mr. Speaker, constituents' complaints about Veterans Affairs ran second only to complaints about the Post Office. That is how badly the Department had slipped. In fact, matters were sufficiently serious to cause the previous Government to establish an independent committee of inquiry to try to sort it all out. The new Government scrapped that committee, rolled up its sleeves and went to work on behalf of Canada's veterans. The result in a very short time of less than three years has been dramatic.

Unquestionably, the number one complaint across Canada was delays in the pension process. Some veterans were waiting up to five years just to get a final ruling on their claims, and their chances of getting a favourable decision were not good at all. Thanks to this Government, delays in the pension process have been slashed by at least half and, in some cases, by over three-quarters. No one wants to hear the statistics anymore because there is no news in good news, yet our accomplishment is not only incredible but a source of real and genuine pride for all associated with it.

I use the word "incredible" and I know it is a very over-worked word. Nonetheless, the slashing we have done with pension processing times has been achieved in the face of an