

*Government Orders*

those who served here and abroad. While we have honoured these veterans through pomp and ceremony, we have failed in many cases to provide them with the compensation that is due them.

I want to briefly refer to a couple of incidents that happened in my riding. First, there was a huge air show in the city of Lloydminster last week where we were able to show off both military and domestic planes in a huge air show. It was a success. The Snowbirds were involved. Of course they are based at the Moose Jaw airbase. They were very well received.

A couple of days later there was another event in my riding. It too occurred in the city of Lloydminster. It was sponsored by the Kinsmen and the Kinnettes. It was a raising of the flag ceremony. It was truly an honour for myself as well the mayor of Lloydminster and one of the MLAs from the area to be involved in the ceremony where annually they raise the flag and we reflect on our country and the democracy we enjoy and remember those who paid a heavy price for the democracy that we enjoy. There was a colour guard there and cadets present, as well as the Kinsmen and the Kinnettes and dignitaries.

Following the raising of the Canadian flag and following the ceremonies I had an opportunity to meet with a couple of veterans. They were two brothers from the area who had just returned from the Netherlands and the celebrations over there. We were able to talk with them about their own experiences, first of all on the advancement into Europe when the liberation took place and then the recent trip over there. They expressed real emotion about the warm greetings and the warm reception they received from the people of Holland for the efforts they had been involved in 50 years before.

As I spoke to one of these veterans, one of these brothers, he said he had not been able to stay the full time. He had not been involved in the entire liberation, he said, because he got hit a few times. He pointed to his left hip and said "I got hit here first and then a little while later I got hit in this hip, and then finally they got me a little higher up, in the arm and the chest. After that they decided they had better send me home."

When we think of the commitment to democracy and we think of the commitment to Canada and what we stand for that was displayed by these veterans 50 years ago, it really humbles us who have not experienced the sacrifice and hardship that they did. It elevates in our minds the value of our veterans for their dedication and for their service to our country, and not only our country but democracy around the world.

Just a few minutes ago we also listened to the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan as he also described some of the horrors of war both past and fairly recently, including the gulf war and the gulf war syndrome.

• (1550)

We realize that war is a terrible thing and that people are involved in it not because they enjoy it but because they feel a sense of duty and want to be involved for the pursuit of peace and democracy.

We realize once again that we do owe them more than just a thank you for a job well done. We need to come through with more than just kind words and phrases, but with actions and deeds as well. That is why it is a privilege for me to speak to Bill C-67, the bill that deals with the Veterans Review and Appeal Board Act.

The government has stated in this House a number of times that the goal of this legislation is to speed up the time it takes veterans to get their disability pensions without the veterans losing any of the rights they currently possess. This too is the aim of the Reform Party. Yet we disagree with the means to this end.

One of the main points of disagreement centres on whether the Bureau of Pension Advocates should remain an independent body at the disposal of veterans at the first level or whether it should be made part of the department reserved for the appeal level only. A number of arguments have been made in the Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs and in this House as well in this regard. They have been reviewed extensively by my colleagues in the Reform Party, my fellow MPs who sit in this part of the House. After careful consideration we have concluded that the Bureau of Pension Advocates should remain an independent body at the disposal of all veterans.

Let me explain. I fail to see how removing the bureau from the first level will save any time in the current system. The only way to speed up the system is to ensure that more applications are accepted at the first level. These applications must be well prepared, because the department currently rejects 70 per cent of first applications but then goes on to accept 80 per cent of appeals at the second or third levels.

The typical time it takes for a bureau lawyer to prepare an application is two to three months, a modest period of time to prepare a case when the veteran is forced to do battle with the department to receive a disability pension. The remaining delays at the first level, which can take up to a year and a half, are the responsibility of the department. Ironically, the government feels that removing the bureau from the first level will speed up the system because they will now focus on appeals only.

Under this legislation, the government intends to have a department clerk assist the veterans in filling out their first level application. The first level decision will then be adjudicated within the department. It could be true the first level decision will be faster, but will the acceptance rate be greater than the current 30 per cent? Given the department's past record of