

Veterans Affairs

Second, there has been a change in the position, posture and attitude of government members. There should be compassion and concern with regard to veterans, but I find a total absence of compassion and concern on the part of government members. In fact it would be like looking for water in the Sahara Desert to find this. Back in March of this year government members took a non-partisan attitude with regard to the legislation which extended the Veterans' Land Act from March 31, 1974, to March 31, 1975. I was rather proud of their attitude and their action concerning this matter.

Now, with the exception of the Minister of Veterans Affairs, I have heard no member of the Liberal Party support this motion. All I have heard from them is that opposition members are taking a partisan attitude. There was no partisanship prior to the legislation of March of this year, but now there is partisanship on behalf of the Liberal members. I recall when they were in a minority position how humble they were in respect of this legislation because they knew they could not enter the election without supporting this legislation. But after July 8 they acquired their old arrogance and their miserable attitude toward veterans. One mistake the Canadian voters made was to give a majority to the Liberal Party.

The third strange thing is that I am amazed that the Liberal members are prepared to accept on behalf of the veterans of this country a vague promise of help which is without substance, form or time. I should like to read from the statement of the Minister of Veterans Affairs to underline how gullible the Liberal members can be with regard to this vague promise. He said:

I expressed the view a moment ago that an urban housing program for veterans who have reached or are approaching retirement from post-war careers is inconsistent with an agriculturally-oriented rehabilitation program which was designed to assist veterans following their discharge from wartime active service.

This is not to say that many low or modest-income veterans do not have needs in respect to housing. On the contrary, it is realized that many do—and that their requirements or preferences are varied in nature. It is in recognition of that awareness, and of the greater relevancy of the provisions of the National Housing Act to those needs, that a study has been undertaken to examine whether special arrangements should be made to assist such veterans.

Because discussions are still in progress, I am not in a position to comment further at this time. I am hopeful, however, that it will be possible for me to do so in the not too distant future.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): It is not even on the drawing board.

Mr. Gilbert: Madam Speaker, as the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre said, it is not even on the drawing board. Not only that, but to expect the government, through the Minister of State for Urban Affairs (Mr. Danson), to bring forward a program which will be acceptable and suitable to the veterans is asking too much. Why do I say that? The present Minister of State for Urban Affairs has been in that ministry for five months. What has he done to cure housing problems across this country? We have seen a drop of 25 per cent in housing starts. That will not help the veterans. We have had the highest interest rates that have ever prevailed across the country. He acts like Santa Claus trying to put young people in poverty by offering them \$500 to buy a home.

A young person over the weekend asked me if I could imagine a minister attempting to persuade him by saying he would give him \$500, and that therefore he could go out and buy a home ranging in price from \$50,000 to \$60,000 or \$70,000, and then pay for it for the rest of his life. If that is not placing young people in poverty and if it is not placing a great strain on their marriages, then I do not know what else is, Mr. Speaker.

The Liberal members would accept the vague promise of the Minister of Veterans Affairs to place this matter in the hands of the Minister of State for Urban Affairs. If there were anything on the drawing board we could examine it, but the minister knows there is not, and yet he says there will be a study concerning whether legislation will be brought forward to help the veteran. I am amazed at the attitude not only of the minister but of all members of the Liberal Party. The veterans of this country are fully aware of what is being done to them. They will rise up with a wrath which would be comparable to that of the great prophet Amos. They will pour forth their thunder and their scorn forever and forever. I am almost preaching.

An hon. Member: Amen!

Mr. Gilbert: What is needed to give the veterans of this country a fair deal? First, we should not even be considering an extension of time with regard to the right of every veteran to establish his entitlement to this special program. There should not have been a qualification time for a certificate set at October 31, 1968, nor should there have been a termination date of March 31, 1974, or of March 31, 1975. If the veterans of this country are to be treated fairly and equitably, there should not be any date whatsoever. They should have the privilege at any time to exercise their rights.

● (1620)

Second, there should be an increase in the limits with regard to the loans. The limitation of \$18,000, which has the net effect of a loan of \$15,400, is not practical today. What we should be doing is getting the figures that are required for people to purchase homes, and adjusting to the prices of houses.

We should be changing the land requirements because the requirement of a half acre back in the 1940's, 1950's and early 1960's is not appropriate today and, as the last speaker so eloquently said, today that just cannot be obtained.

The fourth point is with regard to interest rates. To charge any veteran more than a 6 per cent interest rate on any loan that he obtains, is really treating him in a very niggardly and miserable fashion. At present the rate is 7 per cent.

I want to point out to you, Madam Speaker, the type of trickery that the Department of Veterans Affairs is perpetrating. This letter came to me back on March 20, 1974. It is from a constituent of mine who says:

In response to our recent conversations, I enclose herewith a photostatic copy of a form letter requested to be signed in connection with an application for assistance under VLA. At first glance it would seem to be presuming a change in the Act at April 1st whereas, currently, applications must be in by expiry of the Act March 31 to get consideration. Upward revision of interest rates in Part III in my view would be tantamount to killing the Act as there would be little benefit in obtaining such assistance except at rates at least reasonably below