

*Oral Questions*

what our policy is. This government has been very sensitive.

**Mr. Rex Crawford (Kent):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Veterans Affairs. This government is now attacking veterans by cutting back. In 1985 the government doubled the board and lodging rate for vets. By 1991 it will be almost doubled again for over 1,500 veterans.

The Leader of the Opposition and I met with Legion members this morning. I quote a Korean War veteran: "These guys put their lives on the line, and I think it is a damn shame and a sin that the country doesn't take care of them now". Does the minister believe his cuts meet the test of fairness? How can he justify using our veterans as targets for the deficit cutting shooting gallery?

**Hon. Gerald S. Merrithew (Minister of Veterans Affairs):** Mr. Speaker, the changes that were made by the government with regard to veterans programs were done in consultation and after consultation with veterans organizations in Canada. I want to read one of the lines from one of the veterans' groups since the hon. member read one. It says:

It is obvious that some changes had to be made—because the DVA rate was too low—

They go on to say:

Having studied a large number of case histories of this nature, I had to come to the conclusion that the only statesman-like approach for veterans would be to accept an increase in the rate charged by DVA—

**An hon. member:** Who wrote the letter?

**Mr. Merrithew:** This is by Cliff Chadderton, who happens to be chair of the War Veterans Council and is executive director of the War Amps of Canada, the Legion.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Merrithew:** Mr. Speaker, the Royal Canadian Legion as well has made public statements recommending the changes. They understand the need for changes because they correct inequities in the program.

Let me tell hon. members: We have the best programs for veterans in the world, and we are going to do more this year.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Rex Crawford (Kent):** Mr. Speaker, it must be a small world. The minister has said vets will only have to pay if they can afford it. However, if all 1,500 vets affected paid the full amount for 1990 and 1991, it would be \$5.4 million less than the government says it will save over that two-year period. Why has this government decided that veterans who through this century have fought for Canada in three wars have not given enough? Lest we forget. Is this not a betrayal?

**Hon. Gerald S. Merrithew (Minister of Veterans Affairs):** Mr. Speaker, as we mentioned yesterday, and we mentioned it publicly, all of these charges for board and lodging are subject to income testing. In other words, the people in hospital for their disability will pay nothing. They will pay nothing in the future. With regard to those people who are on War Veterans Allowance or any of the other incomes which we pay these veterans, I can tell you that we will guarantee that there will be \$1,185 a month reserved for them in a case of a married veteran and spouse, and there will be allowances as well for their personal needs.

Let me state that our veterans will pay the lowest rates in Canada now and will pay the lowest rates in the future.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

• (1450)

**Mr. Chris Axworthy (Saskatoon—Clark's Crossing):** Mr. Speaker, in 1988 social programs were a sacred trust, according to the Prime Minister. In 1989 the finance minister promised that money for health and post-secondary education would continue to rise higher than the rate of inflation. Now the Minister of Finance and this government has shattered both those promises, both those commitments to Canadian.

My question is directed to the Minister of Finance. What happened to the national dream, that no matter where you live in Canada, no matter what your financial resources, you are entitled to the same quality of health care as everyone else? Why should the finance minister and his pampered Bay Street buddies have the best health care money can buy, while the less well off Canadians have to settle for less?

**Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance):** Mr. Speaker, this government is, has been, and will be committed to the best health care program that we can