

Veterans Affairs

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I would like to recognize the Hon. Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Hees).

Hon. George Hees (Minister of Veterans Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all Hon. Members for giving me this opportunity to speak during Private Members' Hour. The House has extended the utmost courtesy to me in doing so and I very much appreciate it. In fact, it is an honour to be able to participate in this debate. I would like to congratulate all of those who have spoken in the debate so far on the excellence of what they have said. They have put forward their views on behalf of themselves and their Parties very well indeed.

The motion before us is yet another example of the dedication of the Hon. Member for Victoria (Mr. McKinnon). It is the kind of dedication that he has always shown in dealing with Canada's veterans. No matter the time or place, veterans can always count on the Hon. Member to speak out on their behalf.

In his comments today, the Hon. Member advanced a relevant and forceful argument in support of his motion. It was a superb speech truly befitting a superb motion. Mr. Speaker, I hope the House is not waiting for the other shoe to drop because this is a private Member's motion that I wish to adopt. The Government is perfectly willing to consider the feasibility of following through on the excellent proposals put forward by the Hon. Member for Victoria. I would like nothing better than to go a step further and say that these measures will be acted on immediately. Unfortunately, further study is required.

At present, the British Government is responsible for the payment of World War I gallantry awards made to Canadians. Canada assumed the same responsibility in 1943 for those Canadians who won decorations in World War II. Those Canadians decorated in the Korean War are also the responsibility of our Government.

● (1750)

When the Hon. Member for Victoria first placed his motion on the Order Paper, I initiated inquiries with the British authorities. I wanted to find out how many Canadian veterans were involved and what exactly has been paid to these veterans. As of today, I have not received the answers to these questions. Once the facts are at hand, however, I can assure the House that it will not take me long to reach a decision on this matter.

There is one concern I will be pursuing in the interim. First World War veterans are unique in many ways, and one of those is the almost 70 year tie to the British Crown in respect of gallantry awards. I would not want to sever that tie without first making absolutely certain that the veterans want me to do so.

The second part of the Hon. Member's motion concerns the Distinguished Service Order and the Military Medal. Unlike Second World War veterans, First World War holders of these medals receive no additional pension. In response to this motion, and to a resolution passed by the Royal Canadian

Legion, I wrote to the British authorities to inquire as to what plans the United Kingdom might have to compensate these particular medal holders. I received word last week that it was not considered possible to trace all surviving holders of these medals, let alone to track down the beneficiaries of the estates of those who died. The United Kingdom, therefore, has no plans to compensate these individuals. This reply settles half of the question. The remaining half must be answered by the Canadian Government. I fully intend to do that.

The House has already been most gracious in allowing me to participate in Private Members' Hour. I do not wish to abuse that courtesy by speaking too long. Let me just state once again that I salute the Hon. Member for Victoria for his sincere interest in Canada's veterans. The Hon. Members' motion is commendable and deserves the support of all Members of the House.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Is the House ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Mr. McKinnon, seconded by Mr. Darling, moves:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should consider the advisability of paying veterans of World War I and all recipients of the DSO, the same annuities with respect to gallantry awards received by veterans of World War II.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Motion agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Shall we call it six o'clock?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): It being six o'clock, the hour provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business has now expired.

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

[English]

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 45 deemed to have been moved.

DIVORCE—PROPOSED CHANGE IN WAITING PERIOD

Mr. Bill Attewell (Don Valley East): Mr. Speaker, in the House on May 9 I asked the Minister of Justice (Mr. Crosbie) if he would consider meeting with concerned and interested