

Veterans Land Act
GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

VETERANS LAND ACT

AMENDMENT TO EXTEND DEADLINE FROM MARCH 31, 1974 TO
MARCH 31, 1975

On the order:

Second reading and reference to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs of Bill C-17, to amend the Veterans Land Act.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Before we proceed with the second reading of Bill C-17 I think Your Honour would find that the proposal the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall) was trying to make about an hour ago would now be agreed to by all parties, namely, that after second reading this bill be referred to a committee of the whole rather than to the Standing Committee.

Mr. Speaker: Is this agreed?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Hon. Daniel J. MacDonald (Minister of Veterans Affairs) moved that Bill C-17, to amend the Veterans Land Act be read the second time and referred to committee of the whole House.

He said: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my statement to the House last Tuesday, this measure to extend the new settlement operations of the Veterans Land Act for one year to March 31, 1975, is the result of the further consideration which, on March 12, I undertook to give to representations for an extension of the deadline. I have carefully studied all the relevant data and have come to the conclusion that a one-year extension would certainly be in the best interest of veterans.

As I mentioned in my remarks of March 12, this government and this Minister of Veterans Affairs will take second place to nobody in their interest in matters pertaining to veterans. We have always lived up to our commitments to veterans and we fully intend to continue doing so.

I should like to remind hon. members that the original purpose of the Veterans Land Act was to assist in the rehabilitation of veterans in the postwar period, following wartime active service, and to do so by helping them to settle on the land in rural or semi-rural areas as full or part-time farmers.

● (1550)

The intent of the legislation in these respects was clearly spelled out in the preamble to the act, and I think it is relevant to quote the following parts of the preamble:

'Whereas many men now serving in the active forces of Canada have recorded their desire to settle on land or engage in farming when hostilities cease, and it is desirable that suitably qualified veterans be encouraged to seek rehabilitation in the agricultural industry;

'And whereas part-time farming coupled with other employment is an increasingly important aspect of rural and semi-rural life in Canada;

'And whereas it is in the public interest as a measure of rehabilitation to assist in acquiring the ownership of farm homes by qualified veterans—'

[Mr. Speaker.]

In relation to the purpose of assisting to rehabilitate veterans in civilian life, hon. members know that every veteran has had at least 20 years to make his application, and most have had as long as 30 years. The other two alternative rehabilitation plans were concluded quite some time ago. I think it is clear that the orientation of the Veterans Land Act was directed principally to those veterans interested in agricultural utilization of farm land in rural and semi-rural areas. The financial provisions of the act were founded on this type of settlement, and I think we should not lose sight of those basic factors when we discuss the act.

When we look at some of the facts, we realize that in the eight fiscal years up to March, 1973, after the lending deadlines and revised loan ceilings were established in 1965, approximately 32,700 veterans were settled under the provisions of the act. In the majority of those eight years, the annual number of new establishments has been less than 5,000. In the current fiscal year, however, and more particularly in the last six months, there has been a significant increase in the number of loan applications. It is expected that the number of veterans who will have been settled this year will approximate 5,500—and there are a further 1,400 loan applications on hand awaiting appraisal.

It is in the light of this data as to comparative settlement activity and the increased interest which veterans have shown in the current fiscal year—due undoubtedly to recognition by them of the scheduled lending deadline—that I reached the conclusion an extension of one year would be appropriate. In our analysis of the facts, it became evident that some well-intentioned veterans would have been deprived of a right which they had so gallantly earned if the March '74 deadline had been final. It seems to me that when there is a reasonable doubt, we should not hesitate to decide in favour of the veterans. We must not forget that some years ago they did not hesitate when the survival of freedom was in doubt.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, this extension will provide many veterans with the opportunity to take advantage of a program which was designed for them. It should be made quite clear that we are not doing this as a favour to veterans but simply as a right which they have earned.

Mr. Paproski: It's about time.

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): Who said that?

Mr. Paproski: I did.

Mr. Jack Marshall (Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe): Mr. Speaker, since this bill is now before us it need not take too long to pass it because it does what the minister, a couple of days ago in his statement on motions, said it would do, that is, extend the expiry date of March 31, 1974 to March 31, 1975. Since time is of the essence, and since we are willing to co-operate, we propose to expedite passage of the bill through all stages before the week is out. To that end, we have agreed to give it second reading today and, together with the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) and others, I should like to see this bill considered in Committee of the Whole and passed through all stages today, if possible.