

Government Orders

Hon. Perrin Beatty (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I wonder whether the House would bear with me for just a couple of minutes as I have a comment arising from the hon. member's intervention.

As the hon. member for Bonavista—Trinity—Conception knows, I have nothing but the highest regard for both his contribution to his country while serving in uniform and for the depth and quality of his contribution in the House of Commons when he participates in debates related to the defence of Canada.

As my colleagues in the House of Commons know, one of the practices I try to follow in leaving a portfolio is to refrain generally from making public comment, because I know that my successor has a right to run the department without having me looking over his or her shoulder and without feeling any constraints based on my previous involvement there.

I do want to take advantage of the opportunity presented by the hon. member's remarks today to add just one or two comments in response to him. In saying that I want to associate myself fully with the remarks that the hon. member made about the quality of the men and women serving in Canada's Armed Forces and the tremendous dedication shown by the members of their families. Having spoken to the families of service people who are serving often under very difficult circumstances, and realizing the strains put upon those families of service people, I am very much aware of the human cost often involved in the decision to serve one's country.

I think all members of the House of Commons on both sides of the Chamber would want to support strongly the families and the men and women serving in the Canadian Forces and also associate themselves with the remarks made by the hon. gentleman when he referred to the tremendous contribution made by civilian members within the Department of National Defence.

My hon. friend will know that those of us on this side of the House will disagree with him on his feelings about the need to have called Parliament back early for a debate on this matter. I think he acknowledges that the provisions of the National Defence Act have been fully complied with. The government has made an effort from

the outset to ensure that the Canadian people and Parliament were kept fully informed of the reasons for our involvement in the Middle East and also of the nature of that involvement. The hon. member concluded his remarks by insisting that Parliament continue to be informed. I am sure that my colleagues, the Minister of National Defence and the Secretary of State for External Affairs, will attempt to do precisely that.

I want to associate myself fully with the vast majority of the content of his remarks and congratulate him on what I think were very useful and constructive comments.

• (1210)

In times like this members of Canada's Armed Forces who daily demonstrate their patriotism and their love for Canada are called upon to make special sacrifices and literally to put their lives on the line in defence of freedom and in taking a stand against aggression. I think it is incumbent upon all of us in the House of Commons to set aside the normal partisanship that exists in this place to indicate that they have our full support as they go ahead. Let us indicate as well that the principles in support of freedom, the principles in support of the rule of international law, and the principles in support of those who would resist aggression, remain alive and well in the House of Commons and remain central to the hearts of Canadians from one coast to another.

I want to congratulate the hon. member for his contribution, which I think helps to fully underscore that point.

Mr. Mifflin: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. minister for his comments, realizing that there is a difference of opinion in that regard.

Irrespective of how the motions sit now—as you are aware, Mr. Speaker, we have a motion of the government and an amendment to that motion by this party and an amendment by the NDP—I hope that we can put something together because I think it would be really important to the men and women who are serving our country if we could get all-party, unanimous agreement from the House. Whatever is going on should really have the full support of this House. As one of the 295