

Oral Questions

have raised the matter on numerous occasions in the House. Will the Acting Minister of Veterans Affairs give a firm commitment to this House that he will raise this matter in cabinet and have legislation introduced in Canada similar to what is in force in the United States where pension applications can be processed in 90 days, and not five years?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. J. Gilles Lamontagne (Acting Minister of Veterans Affairs): Madam Speaker, I do not want to take up the responsibility of the present Minister of Veterans Affairs, who is most able to look after the problem.

I think the hon. member for Winnipeg-Assiniboine should be a little better informed about veterans and realize exactly how good this government has been to veterans. This is especially on the eve of November 11, which is the day on which we can demonstrate to our veterans that we took good care of them over the last 30 or 35 years.

When the hon. member for Winnipeg-Assiniboine tells me that we should introduce the American system into Canada in place of what we have, I think our veterans would have a lot to lose.

Mr. Clark: How would you know?

Mr. Lamontagne: The American system does not apply the same way at all, nor does the American system have the same principles by which to evaluate what pensions or benefits our veterans should have or not have. However, I can say that this government has done tremendously well. In the last session we passed legislation to help widows of veterans. Both in this session and the next we will still try to improve that legislation.

COMPENSATION LEVELS FOR DIEPPE PRISONERS OF WAR

Mr. Joe Reid (St. Catharines): Madam Speaker, I regret that the Minister of Veterans Affairs is not here, particularly at this time of the year to answer for himself and for his department. Therefore, may I direct my question to the Acting Minister of Veterans Affairs? Reports and studies have shown that Dieppe prisoners of war have a higher incidence of premature aging, pensionable disabilities and mortality rates than any other prisoners of war or war grouping, except for the Hong Kong veterans.

The present minister has spoken of justice and fair play in the veterans benefit program. Is it just, to compensate those who were prisoners of war for two and one half years or more at the same rate, or at twice the rate payable to prisoners of war who were detained for only some three months?

Hon. J. Gilles Lamontagne (Acting Minister of Veterans Affairs): Madam Speaker the Minister of Veterans Affairs is not in the House because he is representing the Canadian government at Vimy, France, making sure Canada is well represented.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lamontagne: I will take note of the hon. member's question, and I will endeavour to refer it to the present minister.

I would like to tell the hon. member for St. Catharines that I appreciated the fact that he accompanied me on behalf of veterans on the recent pilgrimage to the eastern European countries. I think the hon. member should know that the Canadian government has done tremendously well in providing veterans benefits.

DELAY IN PROCESSING PENSION APPLICATIONS

Mr. Joe Reid (St. Catharines): Madam Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the Acting Minister of Veterans Affairs. I will put my question very simply. What is the use of talking about a great and improved veterans affairs program if veterans who make applications for pensions are to be frustrated and delayed to the extent they are in the processing of their claims? The Acting Minister of Veterans Affairs is in a position to answer that question.

Hon. J. Gilles Lamontagne (Acting Minister of Veterans Affairs): Madam Speaker, I would like to elaborate on the question which the hon. member has asked. However, I much prefer to wait until the Minister of Veterans Affairs is here, who will be able to tell the hon. member what can be done and has been done in this matter. I think that would be a much better approach in view of the fact that the Minister of Veterans Affairs is now responsible for this matter.

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● (1420)

HOUSING

DECLINE IN HOUSING STARTS

Mrs. Margaret Mitchell (Vancouver East): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the minister responsible for CMHC who might better be called the minister of housing disaster. Recently the minister bragged that monthly housing starts have increased since he took over his portfolio. We now learn from the housing industry that housing starts are at their lowest monthly rate since 1960. October figures show a decrease of 52 per cent in housing starts compared to last year. Will the minister now tell the truth? Will he admit that the home building industry is in very deep trouble with high unemployment of building trades workers, and will he tell us what plans he has to encourage the construction of some 220,000 units of housing, which is the minimum required to keep Canadians housed?

Hon. Paul J. Cosgrove (Minister of Public Works): Madam Speaker, I am sure the hon. member will be encouraged to know, notwithstanding the drop in starts which she has identified for the month of October, that in fact the starts for the year 1981 will be increased over those of 1980, so that the anticipated starts for this year are still somewhere in the range