

Adjournment Debate

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): There being no further members rising for debate, the time provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business has now expired.

Pursuant to Standing Order 96(1), the order is dropped from the Order Paper.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): In view of the fact that the late show will start in about 10 minutes, we will suspend the sitting to the call of the Chair.

The sitting of the House was suspended at 5.49 p.m.

SITTING RESUMED

The House resumed at 5.58 p.m.

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

[*English*]

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. George Proud (Hillsborough): Mr. Speaker, on April 29 I asked the Minister of Veterans Affairs to assure veterans that none of the benefits or programs they receive will be cut, especially in light of the fact that an official at the Privy Council Office called for a cut across the board of 10 per cent in all departments.

The reply I received that day was from the government House leader. Unfortunately it did not satisfy me nor did it satisfy the hundreds of employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs in Charlottetown and across the country.

Please allow me to refresh the parliamentary secretary's memory. The government House leader said: "We in Canada have the most generous program of veterans benefits of any country in the world and we intend to maintain them". His response directly conflicts with that of the Privy Council director.

I then asked the government House leader to assure the people who deliver these programs that none of their

jobs would be cut. He then accused me—and I use that term lightly—of caring not only about the area of which I am opposition critic but also for caring about my constituents.

Let me say what he said. "I thought the hon. member was interested in veterans. Now I find out he is interested in his constituents' jobs". He went on to say: "Let me assure the hon. member that veterans affairs will continue to operate in Charlottetown. As long as veterans are still alive we will have public servants there providing the services they need".

The government House leader thought his response was a good joke. However veterans and employees of the department are not laughing.

• (1800)

I did not find the answers very useful when it came to settling the doubts and fears which have been raised about the long-term plans of this government and the future plans for veterans affairs.

It is a given that Canada has some of the most generous and beneficial veterans legislation in the world and we want to keep it that way. What is not so readily accepted by this government is that the Department of Veterans Affairs has some of the best employees in this government. However morale at this department is now low. As a matter of fact a recent departmental survey shows a great deal of employee dissatisfaction and low morale.

The survey showed that 91 per cent of the workers at St. Anne de Bellevue Hospital acknowledged they were worried about the hospital's future. The veterans and the employees both deserve to know what the future plans are for the department. Will there be staff cuts now or in the immediate future? Will there be cuts to programs? Will the political masters of the department still direct employees to treat the veterans with courtesy, generosity and speed or will there be a subtle change in that policy also?

Will there still be a Department of Veterans Affairs or will these deserving Canadians find themselves and their interests swallowed up in a larger department under the direction of a part-time minister?

Has this government formulated any long-term plans or will it continue, as it has been doing, adding more political appointees to senior positions while at the same