

Veterans Affairs

At that time I was employed as the Manager of the Delhi Auction Exchange, owned my own home in Delhi, and if I knew of the deadline, I had no reason to register for a permit. However, as you no doubt know, I have since lost my position (I was never given any reason for the dismissal) and now I am trying something new.

The property in Lynedoch consists of a house and six acres with about 1½ acres of cleared land and in order to make the necessary repairs and purchase some small equipment I may find it necessary to place a small mortgage on the property.

If there is any way you could assist me in obtaining the necessary registration permit, I would appreciate it very much.

I think that indicates what this debate is all about. There are many others who neglected to qualify because the amount of the loan was meaningless to them. There is simply not enough money available to be of any use in today's society. I have another letter which bears that out, and this is only an example of many that have come to me and I am sure to others. This letter is from a Mr. Braley of Simcoe, who states:

Most country or city lots cost way over \$15,400 so what choice does a vet have to take advantage of this? Would you please ask parliament if they would please consider increasing the amount of loan at reasonable rates of interest so that I and others could be helped?

I made some inquiries of a licensed real estate appraiser in respect of the value of land and houses in my area. He indicated that an unserviced rural building lot costs from \$7,000 to \$8,000; serviced town building lots cost from \$12,000 to \$15,500, and that a house and lot in the town of Simcoe cost \$39,900, that is for the very cheapest. So you can see how meaningless has become the amount available. Those are the things that officials of the department should be taking into consideration when they suggest that not enough veterans are interested.

The third reason often advanced in support of phasing out the VLA is that the act was not designed for the type of housing required today, but was designed to settle full-time farmers on the land. The argument continues that those who would qualify now would be too old to enter this occupation. At this point in time that may well be true, but surely it is not beyond the comprehension of those in the department to change the plan and the conditions.

I well recall my earlier interest in the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs when I asked a former director general about lot sizes. I suggested that we could change the size that veterans must have to meet the conditions of the various towns and villages, and in reply he suggested that we could not change the rules in the middle of the ball game. The minister now does not want to change the rules, he wants to call the game in the seventh inning when there are 100,000 veterans who could still qualify. It is inconceivable to me that officials would want to kill this program rather than change it, particularly at this time when housing is desperately needed by veterans, many of whom are in the declining years of their lives.

That is the thinking of the department in spite of the statement by the minister on March 31, 1974, when we were debating this matter and he said:

I believe, Mr. Speaker, this extension will provide many veterans with the opportunity to take advantage of a program which was designed for them.

[Mr. Knowles (Norfolk-Haldimand).]

He concluded by stating:

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.

If that is true, and I am sure we all agree, why in the world are we trying to get rid of this thing?

In conclusion I would simply like to summarize what I have been trying to say by listing the essential changes the minister must consider if we are to retain the Veterans' Land Act and make it meaningful and useful to veterans in today's economy. This should be the minister's task in the ensuing 15 days when he makes his decision, or decides—and from what we have heard about this we are skeptical—to introduce a new housing program. The new program, if there is to be one, must be exclusively for veterans. They are a special group. They did a special service for their country and deserve special recognition.

● (1610)

Second, the increase in the loan ceiling in respect of house and lot must be made realistic in light of today's escalating costs.

Third, lot size should conform with lot sizes set forth in provincial and/or municipal regulations and bylaws.

Fourth, the terms of repayment should be as generous as those which now exist in the present act.

Fifth, there should be attractive interest rates, even subsidized if necessary. These are the conditions the minister should note when drafting new legislation or when setting levels which we hope he will do. All these terms are not something the motion gives gratuitously or grudgingly. They belong to the veterans as a right, as the minister has so well said, because they have been justly earned.

Mr. John Gilbert (Broadview): Madam Speaker, the government is not keeping faith with the veterans in Canada. I say that because I cannot believe that the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. MacDonald) has his heart, mind and soul in terminating the Veterans' Land Act on March 31, 1975. I consider him to be a man of compassion and concern. I just cannot believe he would not support this motion put from the opposition.

I appreciate that the minister has lost the war with his cabinet colleagues and the backbenchers in the Liberal Party. He has failed to gain any support whatsoever for the needs of the veterans in Canada. All I can say to the members of the Liberal Party who have spoken is that they have adopted a very cold, callous, calculating and hypocritical attitude toward the veterans of Canada.

Three strange things are happening in this debate. First, we are debating a motion in respect of government legislation moved and seconded by opposition members. It is a credit to the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) and the hon. member for Humber-St. George's St-Barbe (Mr. Marshall) that they have brought forward this motion at this time to underline the need to extend the legislation. It is the first time in my nine years here when I have seen two opposition members bring forward for debate a motion on government legislation. This is a credit to them.