

afterwards I could have had the case pushed forward much more quickly for the veteran. Everyone along the line must have a real feeling for veterans issues. The appropriate information must be in the hands of the decision makers.

• (1325)

I could not agree more with the hon. member that the quality of people making the decision is extremely important. That is why any appointees in that area of decision making or any other area of decision making in government, in the public service, on boards or commissions, must be of the highest calibre of both personal and academic qualities.

Mr. Ringma: Mr. Speaker, is this on debate?

The Deputy Speaker: We are still on questions or comments. Is the member rising on questions or comments?

Mr. Ringma: No, I am not.

The Deputy Speaker: I see no one else standing. Resuming debate, the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan.

Mr. Bob Ringma (Nanaimo—Cowichan, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk about waiting. I have been waiting all week to get in a few words on this bill, with the vagaries of government.

I would like to ask the Speaker if this debate is now cut off in five minutes.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Ringma: So I have five minutes.

I would like to start by saying that the intention of Bill C-67 is indeed good. I agree with the words of the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke that we must give veterans all the recognition possible and speed things up.

This bill proposes to reduce the existing backlog of appealed pension cases and shorten the decision time. I do not think, with the way they are going about it, this will be achieved.

The big thing I want to put front and centre is that I totally object to the removal of the Bureau of Pension Advocates from the first level. This is something that has given veterans the real representation they need to make their cases. By withdrawing it from that level and putting it into the second level the government is doing them a real disservice.

The intent of the bill is to cut down the waiting time. I really wonder about that. I would like to share some of my experience with members of the House.

Let us look at recognition of veterans today. How long does it take for us to recognize what is happening? It has taken us over 50 years as a government, the Liberals or the Conservatives or whoever, to recognize the merchant navy. Merchant navy people

have been trying to plead their case for all those years. Finally we are doing something about it.

It took veterans of the Korean War 40 years to get a medal of their own. They said they thought they deserved something more than just a British Commonwealth medal or a United Nations one. It took 40 years for that.

Dieppe was one of the costliest battles of World War II, the Dieppe landing. It took 50 years to get just a little clasp for a medal to recognize that very significant action, debatable action though it may be, at Dieppe. It took 50 years for that.

We are still waiting for a Canadian volunteer service medal for peacekeeping operations. A proposal was put to the House to achieve it, but it was negated by the House. So those veterans are still waiting.

All in all, National Defence and Veterans Affairs are very slow in reacting to anything. I suspect that C-67 is not going to improve that at all.

Over my lifetime I can look at hearing problems within the military and of course with the veterans today. Hearing was recognized as problem, with people going onto the firing ranges and practising weaponry with no ear covers whatsoever. The result is that many of us have hearing loss today. It took years, literally decades, for the departments to recognize the problem and do something about it. That has left today's veterans with the same problem.

Many of us went up to Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd. in Chalk River to clean up nuclear spills. The departments of national defence and veterans affairs to this day are putting their hands out saying that they will not talk about it.

I went to clean up a spill in 1952 or 1953 and as a result, I became ill. When I retired some 30 years later, I put down as part of my release procedure that I had been subjected to this problem. Neither national defence nor veterans affairs would give recognition to it.

On agent orange, our people have been to Vietnam. Perhaps they have been subjected to the effects of agent orange.

I could go on but I see the Speaker is getting ready to close off debate. I must respect the Speaker's right.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member will have 15 minutes the next time the matter is debated. I apologize for interrupting his speech.

Mr. Boudria: I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I know there are differences of opinion on some of the clauses of the bill. Notwithstanding that, I wonder if there would be consent to proceed to the vote. We could amend the bill as some members want in committee. I know that Monday is a very important veterans day for the war amputees in Canada. Perhaps we could do that. Some of the remarks of the hon. member could perhaps