

Veterans Allowance Increases

Mr. Speaker, when we have shown our veterans that, together, we have endeavoured to improve their lot and to enable them to be active citizens despite handicaps or diseases which are a direct consequence of their activities on war theatres, then all of us can make a contribution to the progress of Canada. I hope that the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Dubé) will take the necessary steps in this connection.

• (4:40 p.m.)

[*English*]

Mr. William Knowles (Norfolk-Haldimand): Mr. Speaker, it gives me much pleasure to take part in this debate today. I was a member of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs and, speaking as a relative newcomer to this chamber, I can say that my service on that committee has been one of my more rewarding experiences as a member of the House of Commons. In that committee there seems to be no sparring for political advantage; everyone seems sincerely and honestly to be working for the benefit of the veterans of this country.

I support wholeheartedly the motion moved so eloquently by my hon. friend the member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall). No one who listened to his speech could help but be moved by the sincerity with which it was delivered and the well chosen language in which it was couched. I congratulate him upon the timeliness as well as upon the content of this motion.

The theme of my own remarks is the need for urgent action. Other hon. members have pointed out that there are certain landmarks evident in the course of our progress toward effective legislation. Mention has been made of the work of the Woods committee, perhaps the beginning of this long road, and of the deliberations of the veterans committee of the House of Commons under the impartial chairmanship of the hon. member for Ottawa-West (Mr. Francis). The report of that committee was tabled in this House. Then, it was in the hands of the Minister of Veterans Affairs so that he could bring forth the much needed legislation. But since that time I fear we have had nothing but promises that the question is being studied, that his officials are working on the legislation. This legislation has been long awaited. I have no doubt that the officials are doing their best. But surely this is not good enough. How long must we wait? Perhaps it is not unfair to say that we are beginning to wonder whether the government is so callous as to wait for the law of attrition to come into operation; for the inexorable passage of time to take its toll of our veterans in the country. Those men who risked their all in the service of their country surely deserve a better fate.

• (4:50 p.m.)

Reference has been made in the debate to the timeliness of this motion in view of the fact that in two weeks-time we will celebrate Remembrance Day. This was alluded to by the mover of the motion. Surely this legislation, so long in production and in introduction, would be the finest tribute to the fallen and the brightest wreath for the cenotaph of memory that the minister could lay in the ceremony that remembers our veterans.

[Mr. LeBlanc (Rimouski).]

In honouring them in this way, we would not only be honouring those who have paid the supreme sacrifice; we would also be giving desperately needed assistance to the living, to those who are barely existing on present veterans allowances.

The other facet of the motion deals with the very great need for an increase in our veterans allowances. Perhaps it would be redundant or repetitious again to draw attention to the poverty line laid down by the Economic Council of Canada in 1968, which was set at \$1,800 for a single person. Surely, during these inflationary years the cost of living has increased much beyond that figure, yet the allowance for a single veteran is only \$1,260 a year. The poverty line was set for a married person at \$3,000 a year, yet a married veteran receives an allowance of only \$2,100 a year. I suggest that is adequate evidence that there is a long awaited need for an increase in our veterans allowances.

If that is not enough, Mr. Speaker, let me inform you that any member of the House who has visited a Legion branch or a branch of the Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans Associations to talk to the men knows that many of these veterans are living in conditions of what I would call object poverty and despair. As has been pointed out, when these people are able to earn a few extra dollars by one means or another, this money is immediately deducted from their veterans allowance. Not because our officials want to do this; in the main they have the welfare and the good of our veterans at heart. But the officials are tied by the act and regulations under which they work. As the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) said, if it is necessary to bring in two bills, then let us do so. But let us see if we cannot do something to assist people living in the conditions I have described.

I said at the beginning that I would be brief, and I conclude simply with this. I urge, with all the sincerity, at my command, that the government bring in the long awaited bill or bills to benefit our veterans. Let the minister rest assured that he will receive all the assistance necessary from members on both sides of the House to give the legislation speedy passage.

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

SUBJECT MATTER OF QUESTIONS TO BE DEBATED

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Order. It is my duty at this time, pursuant to Standing Order 40, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Shefford (Mr. Rondeau); health and welfare—measures to reduce the cost of hospital, medical and dental care; the hon. member for Marquette (Mr. Stewart); national defence—reconsideration of closing of Rivers air base; the hon. member for Gander-Twillingate (Mr. Lundrigan); fisheries—initiatives to offset overfishing by foreign druggers—Oceanographic Studies.