

Government Orders

we prepared to have our memorial cenotaph ceremony the farmers in the field surrounding that area left their horses standing in the field and left their hoes and other tools in the field and came over and stood around the cenotaph with us.

We know that the Dutch feelings have been poured out to Canadians, not only during the last number of days but indeed during the last 50 years. It is one reason why we cannot hesitate for one moment to try to provide better medical services for veterans in this country. At the same time, we must remember the people who today are serving in the Canadian Armed Forces in very difficult areas of this world.

Medical attention to veterans is very important. When we consider that the average age of World War II veterans today is 73 years, it becomes more important that the process for their receiving pensions that are coming to them is speeded up.

We all remember the days of our youth when young people were going off to war, whether it was the Korean War or the second world war. Others remember people leaving for peace-keeping operations. I remember very well that when I was in elementary school we had truckloads of these young Canadians passing by our rural school on their way to their training base and indeed some of them on their way overseas. They threw chocolate bars and candies to us in the schoolyard as they went by. Today these are the people we are talking about in this House of Commons. If there is any way we can speed up the process, get them their pensions, and make their days more comfortable at this time, then I am sure that is the objective of every member of this House.

If we do not remember our veterans, if we do not look after them, then we as a nation are not keeping faith with those who died. They are their buddies. For those who returned home, it is our duty and the duty of any government and the Parliament of Canada to support anything that can be done to make the lives of our veterans more comfortable in the days they have left.

I would ask the House to give third reading to this bill today so that we can get on with the process of putting it into place to try to get that backlog cleaned up in the meantime and make the process much speedier for the future without damaging the quality of service that is given to veterans in the hearing of their cases.

● (1320)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Godin: Mr. Speaker, because I was a member of the committee that studied this bill, and since they are talking about fast-tracking the process at some point or other, I would like to ask my colleague to explain why it is such a long process, because it makes no sense at all that it takes so much time.

Earlier, I gave two examples: the case of the veteran who has been trying to obtain a pension for 30 years and the case of the applicant who has now received, I think, some 12 or 14 decisions, but is still awaiting the verdict.

In committee we were told that only 30 per cent of all cases brought before the Canadian Pension Commission were accepted while 70 per cent of all cases subsequently submitted for review were accepted. Why? The commission could not explain this, it never looked into it, wondered, etc. The question I have always asked myself is whether partisan appointments to this commission were the reason.

At a certain point, the Bloc Quebecois proposed that from now on—do not forget that these people are appointed for 10 years—the provinces be consulted, that the process become more transparent and that the government start appointing people for their competence and not their political affiliation. I was surprised that the Liberal Party opposed the idea at the time. I would like to hear the hon. member's comments on the issue.

[*English*]

Mr. Hopkins: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his question. He is quite right. If we want to talk about partisanship, I do not know the people who served in those positions, so I am not in a position to comment on their partisanship or otherwise on the floor of the House. However, I can tell the hon. member that it is the policy of the government to appoint well-qualified people to any boards or commissions that require appointments in the country, and the level of appointments to the various veterans boards will indeed be of good quality people.

The other thing that has to be considered is not just their qualities academically, but they also have to have humanitarian qualities. They must have an understanding and a feeling for what they are doing. If you do not have a feeling for what you are doing when you deal with people's problems, that is when you run into difficulty.

The hon. member probably hit it on the head when he mentioned partisanship. Anybody can talk about partisanship when they are in opposition. We used to do it ourselves. We are hearing the same thing today. However, I do not want to get into that, because it is a non-winner for everybody. The only thing that is a winner for the veterans of this country is that they get speedier service and that the people who are making those decisions are indeed qualified to make them, both from the understanding of the case before them and their feeling for the subject with which they are dealing.

Sometimes cases are held up because all of the information is not there. I have dealt with cases myself where if I had had the information that was given to me several days or months