

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

[English]

VETERANS AFFAIRS—INQUIRY AS TO AMENDMENT OF
VETERANS LAND ACT

Mr. Bill Knight (Assiniboia): Mr. Speaker, on June 2, as reported at page 2803 of *Hansard*, I ask the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Laing) the following question:

In view of the fact that the Minister of Agriculture has introduced a bill to amend the Farm Credit Act which will increase the limit on loans, can the minister inform the House whether he will be proposing any amendments or changes to the Veterans Land Act?

The minister responded as follows:

Mr. Speaker, there has been a disinclination on the part of the Department of Veterans Affairs to extend and expand the opportunity for veterans to go into farming. It has been regarded as a phase-out operation.

It is an over-all policy of this government to be disinclined to promote farming, including farming by veterans. The government must come to a full recognition that our veterans sacrificed so much for my generation in order that I might grow up in a democratic society. I would point out to those who may wonder why I speak on this topic that I am the first in four generations of my family who has not had to put on a military uniform to serve in the defence of Canada.

This government should have recognition for the people brought into such service and should consider a number of changes in dealing with veterans, including an amendment to update the Veterans Land Act to cover the veterans of the Korean war. Along with that there should be a number of other changes in the method of dealing with veterans in our society. There should be a greater increase in benefits for the 29,000 war veterans under age 65 whose allowances were increased by only 3.6 per cent in the Turner budget. That is one area in which there could be real improvement.

There should be a change in the Old Age Security Act in terms of reducing the age from 65 to 60 for veterans and non-veterans alike. This would further help enhance employment in Canada. Administration in the department for handling applications should be increased to meet the present backlog of applications before the pension commission. I talk of a backlog of some 7,000 applications which have not been dealt with by that department. In addition a single, 100 per cent war disability pensioner receives \$3,500 per year. This should be raised to \$4,500 as suggested by the Royal Canadian Legion. Along with that there should be increased domiciliary care facilities for disabled veterans within reasonable distance of their residences. These are some of the things that should be done by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Though the years keep extending the distance from the days when these gentlemen served the needs of this country, ours is the generation and the government that should not forget the services they rendered to Canada. The government should be concerned with bringing in changes to ensure that these people are taken care of in this part of the twentieth century.

Mr. Lloyd Francis (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Veterans Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I listened with a good deal of interest to the various charges against the government by the hon. member. I sat as chairman of the committee which last year was responsible for a report, on the basis of which the government substantially rewrote the veterans' charter. I am of a generation that did serve in the last war. The hon. member said he was the first in four generations of his family who had not been obliged to do so. I hope he is never obliged to do so.

This government has by no means forgotten its obligation to veterans. Let me refer, for example, to Bill C-215, to amend the Pension Act, which will increase the number of staff of the pension commission to deal with the backlog of applications of which the hon. member spoke.

As far as the Veterans Land Act is concerned, this was a specific measure introduced after World War II, designed as part of a package for the rehabilitation of veterans, and it has very substantially served that purpose. Many thousands of veterans have been settled on the land as a result of its provisions. But now the decision has been made to phase it out as a specific veterans measure. As the minister indicated in the House, those measures designed to encourage Canadians to go into agriculture are within the responsibility of the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Olson). That legislation has been amended, changed and brought up to date but a terminal date has been put on the Veterans Land Act provisions.

In view of the many thousands of applications under the Veterans Land Act, and the government's decision to phase out this aspect of the legislation, it would not be fair to those who have gone before to have changes brought in for those who come in just under the wire, getting the benefit of substantial changes in ceilings, terms and conditions. I think it is only fair and appropriate that measures designed to encourage Canadians to go into agriculture should be dealt with in that context.

There are other measures benefiting veterans. The hon. member touched upon a wide range of them. If I had had a little notice of the range of points he intended to raise, I might have brought more information to the House. But I want to assure the House that Canada has not forgotten its veterans. Canada is well aware of its debt to its veterans and intends to honour it.

Motion agreed to and the House adjourned at 10.24 p.m.