

[Translation]

Mr. Guy LeBlanc (Rimouski): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy and pleased, like those hon. members who had the floor before me, with this opportunity to take part in the debate on the important motion introduced by the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall), whom, besides, I wish to congratulate.

Mr. Speaker, may I be allowed to congratulate also the hon. member for Ottawa West (Mr. Francis) for the very elaborate speech he delivered a while ago, supplying us with many explanations and interesting and useful information concerning his work. All of us recognize that he was a most devoted and dynamic chairman of the Committee on veterans affairs.

It is therefore my pleasure to express my opinion on the motion of the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe and on the amendment proposed by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles).

This motion is actually quite interesting and comes at the right time since we have just finished the debate on the Address in reply to the Speech from the Throne and the debate dealing with the adoption of the measures which the government has had to take to deal with certain problems threatening the peace in this country.

The government is encouraged to introduce a bill aimed at implementing as soon as possible the recommendations of the second report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, and one cannot but be delighted. So is it in so far as increases in the allowances paid to veterans are concerned. It is normal that Canadians hope that the upgrading of allowances will allow all veterans to face the current increase in the cost of living.

We are very happy to have the opportunity to discuss this motion, with the hope that effective legislation will be passed soon. Veterans have the same needs as other citizens, but they have merits that others do not have.

While some other Canadian citizens were able to take advantage of their younger years in order to prepare for their future, by getting an education which would allow them to practice a trade or profession, ensuring their welfare and that of their families, those veterans sacrificed many years of their youth.

And the purpose of their activities during those years they sacrificed, so to speak, was certainly most sublime. This was the defence of our country, of freedom—which gives us cause for reflection, these days—of democracy, and Christianity.

The veterans I know best are of course those of my riding of Rimouski. Several of them come regularly to see me. Then I am able to ascertain that their needs are very easy to meet and that the government should more and more look into their problems in order to give them the help they deserve.

There are some of them who, after having lost the best years of their lives, as I said earlier, are facing financial and other difficulties. There is at present no special measure to help them.

There are others who, after having met with accidents which cannot easily be documented at times—accidents

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which could have occurred as they were performing their duties—are suffering terrible pain and are extremely handicapped. There is perhaps a lack of specific organizations to study their cases in order to apply the law in their favour and that of their family.

Sometimes, they do not get the proper kind of counsel when going before the Appeals Board. They often lack money and sufficient education to properly inform counsel defending them.

It might, in certain cases, be appropriate to have legislation authorizing them to avail themselves of the assistance of independent counsel, or, as we say in Quebec, of lawyers in private practice.

There should not be undue emphasis, in order not to mislead the Canadian people, on the fact that the government or Parliament delays taking active and efficient interest in presumably bringing forth a bill since, after all, legislation for the purpose of assisting veterans does exist.

When, a little over five years ago, the government established the Woods Committee, other people realized how important the problem was. Within the framework of the country's overall policy it was desirable, while helping veterans as much as possible, to proceed with some caution. As a rule commissions cannot get their work done quickly.

It is said that the report was tabled in 1968, or thereabouts, and I find it normal that the government should have prepared a white paper to make it easier to pass suitable legislation.

Since we are living under a democratic system, it is necessary that the representatives of the people may express their views on these issues. Even though commissions of scientists had scrutinized these questions, the committee went to work. The hon. member for Ottawa West said earlier how exhaustive the study was and with what determination all hon. members discussed the matter for the greatest benefit of veterans.

The committee report was brought before the House in June 1970, before the summer adjournment. At the beginning of this new session, we are precisely talking about legislation to be introduced eventually.

As for the speech of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, I listened to it with much interest. While he was depicting the situation to us, I noticed his experience, the ease with which he spoke of these matters, his knowledge and his skill. Generally speaking, I share his views on this subject. As for retroactivity to April 1, 1970 for veterans' allowances I feel that his arguments are very interesting. I also wonder why he draws so much attention to other problems.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, I am happy to say that I support the principle of the motion and the amendment and I am happy to find that some concern is shown for our veterans.

I hope that the government will, as soon as possible, introduce a bill that will satisfy the wishes of those who have fought for our country and our principles in other lands throughout the world.